

Vast Differences

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Summary: When Stoick goes with Hiccup to search for the Night Fury, an unexpected decision by his son leaves Stoick changed by the experience...in more ways than one. Now Stoick must rebuild and maintain his relationship with Hiccup, but its difficult to be a father when you are also one of the most feared dragons in Berk.

1. A Different Path

Chapter 1 - A Different Path

The forest was quiet as Hiccup paced nervously through the forest, his eyes glued to the crudely drawn map of Berk in his journal. Dry leaves crunched beneath his boots, one of the few sounds that broke the natural stillness of it all. Occassionally, he would stop, mark or erase something on the map, or even just stare at it for a few moments, and then continue walking as though he hadn't stopped at all. Every now and again, he would mumble something along the lines of "It would've gone this way." or "It has to be over here."

Then he stopped, pressing his pencil onto a specific spot on his map. Excited, he looked up, hoping to see something, anything that could signify that this search wasn't just a huge waste of time. But his excitement faded as quickly as it had come, as up ahead lay nothing but more trees and dead leaves. No dragon in sight...

An irritated huff came from behind Hiccup, making him cringe. He peered over his shoulder nervously, looking up into the unimpressed expression of his father, Stoick the Vast. The larger Viking glared down at him, his arms folded across his chest, and the fierce scowl he wore made Hiccup want to bury himself beneath the dirt.

"I um...must have gotten turned around somewhere back there." Hiccup said meekly, facing forward and starting to walk again. No reply came from Stoick, who only rolled his eyes and followed his son deeper

into the forest.

* * *

><p>Stoick was fuming as he carried his son by his shirt collar, the latter of whom was spilling out excuses for the trouble he had caused as quickly as his mouth would let him. After fighting a Monstrous Nightmare with his own bare fists, only for a pillar to fall and help free a group of Nadders that he had helped to capture, what did his son have to say for himself?<p>

"I hit a Night Fury." he had said, as if that ridiculous statement would make things better. And that was why Stoick was now carrying him home, not even trusting his son to find his way there without doing something else to make his morning worse.

"It's not like the last few times Dad!" Hiccup yelled, making Stoick's eye twitch as memories of said times flashed through his mind. "I mean I really actually hit it! You guys were busy and I had a very clear shot! It went down just off Raven Point." Stoick unceremoniously let go of Hiccup, who turned to face him as soon as he was back on his own two feet. "Let's get a search party out there, before it-"

"STOP!" Stoick yelled, finally having had enough. He closed his eyes and took a breath, forcing himself to remain calm before opening them to look at his son again. "Just...stop."

Silence fell between them for a moment, a small crowd watching the Chief with his son.

"Every time you step outside, disaster follows." Stoick said, a statement that at one time would've hit Hiccup like a sack of bricks, but the latter was, sadly, used to it by now. "Can you not see that I have bigger problems? Winter is almost here and I have an entire village to feed!"

Hiccup looked around at the villagers surrounding them, looking too nonplussed for Stoick's taste.

"Between you and me, the village could do with a little less feeding, don't ya think?" the young Viking said, oblivious to the indignant reactions of some of the more self-conscious villagers.

"This isn't a joke, Hiccup!" Stoick said, growing exasperated. "Why can't you follow the simplest orders?"

"I can't stop myself." Hiccup answered. "I see a dragon and I have to just...kill it, you know? It's who I am, Dad."

Stoick sighed. "You are many things, Hiccup. But a dragon killer..."

Stoick's voice trailed off as he looked away from his son. What was he going to say? That his son wasn't a dragon killer? It was true of course, but a part of him still held out hope for his son. The tiniest sliver of hope that one could hold, but hope nonetheless. Add that to the fact that his son clearly had the ambition, even if it did mean disobeying his elders...

"...well, you're not one yet." Stoick finished.

"I know." Hiccup said, starting to sound exasperated himself. "That's why I'm telling you, I shot down a Night Fury!"

A few gasps could be heard from the crowd, and everyone looked to Stoick for his response. The chief of the Hairy Hooligans looked neither surprised nor impressed. Instead, Stoick rubbed a hand down his face and shook his head, his annoyance with his son reaching its peak. Out of all the things his son had done, this was the most delusional thing he had ever heard, from any Viking. Seeing this response, the villagers began to disperse, some thinking the boy had completely lost his mind, others laughing at the idea of the scrawny kid taking down the most feared of dragons.

"Hiccup I am not-" Stoick began.

"Dad, by Odin, I swear, it's in the forest, most likely off Raven Point."

"Hiccup I-"

"If we just get a search party together-"

"ENOUGH!" Stoick cried, shutting up Hiccup. "I am not going to waste the morning looking for a Night Fury that you may, or may NOT, have shot down." Stoick threw his hands up in the air. "How would you have shot it down anyway?"

"I used a bola launcher." Hiccup said, eager to explain himself.

"A what?" Stoick interrupted. "You've been inventing stuff again, haven't you?" he said, his fists clenching.

"Yes dad...but this time it actually did what it was supposed to do!" Hiccup answered quickly, seeing the angry look on his father's face.

Stoick didn't relax as he looked into Hiccup's eyes, looking for the slightest hint of a lie or self-doubt, but he found none. In its place, however, was the look of a young man who desperately wanted his father to believe him for once. Hiccup looked down, away from his father's intense and judging gaze, as his father continued to decide of what to do with him.

A few moments passed in which neither of the two said anything. They were completely alone now, the villagers having left to get busy rebuilding and take stock of their losses.

Stoick let out a deep breath. "Alright."

Hiccup looked up, an eyebrow raised in suspicious disbelief.

"Alright? Is that a 'Alright, you believe me.' or 'Alright, let's drop the matter entirely?'" Hiccup asked sarcastically.

"I don't believe you." Stoick replied bluntly. "At least, not until we find the dragon."

"Ok then, I'll just-wait what?" Hiccup said, doing a double take as his face lit up with excitement.

"Just you and I." Stoick said. "We'll go into the forest and search for the thing ourselves."

Hiccup beamed. "Oh, thank you dad!" he said. "You won't regret this, I promise you!" He turned to head into the house. "Let me just get my journal, there's a map that we can--"

"Hiccup." Stoick interrupted.

"Yeah?" his son replied, pausing with one foot in the house.

"It better be there." Stoick growled.

Hiccup's eagerness visibly evaporated at the Chief's words, and after gulping down his fear, he headed inside to grab his journal.

* * *

><p>The morning sun's rays shined beautifully through the trees of the forest, but the nice scenery did nothing to improve Stoick's mood. His son's constant turning and stopping was now starting to drive him insane. It wouldn't have bothered him so much if he thought that Hiccup knew where he was going, but over an hour had passed since they had started their search, and they were still yet to find a dragon. Although as Stoick believed that there was likely no dragon to find in the first place, all of this was quickly beating down what little patience he had left into the ground. Not to mention that the sliver of hope he had held that Hiccup might ever become a true Viking had long since been spent on this pointless escapade.<p>

Finally, after some more walking, turning, and stopping, Stoick had had enough.

"Hiccup." he said, his voice tired and annoyed. His anger from before had mostly faded during their search...mostly.

Hiccup stopped, but didn't turn around, too engrossed in his journal. "Yes dad?"

"We've been out here searching all morning, and we haven't seen a single trace of your dragon." Stoick said. Hiccup quickly turned to face him, almost as if he had expected this moment.

"No, dad, it's around here somewhere!" the young Viking said, almost pleadingly. "I promise, just give me a little more time, and I'll--"

"No." Stoick said, the finality in his voice making his son go quiet. "We're done here."

Hiccup's shoulder's drooped, and his expression was sullen as he closed his journal. "Well, I guess it's as good a time as any to stop now. I was completely lost anyway." he muttered. He looked up at his dad, who was already busy trying to find out which way was north. At the same time, he also looked to be trying hard to forget his son was there, and that he was the reason they had wasted the morning

wandering around the forest. Hiccup struggled to think of what to say.

"Look dad." the boy began, looking down at the ground. "I'm sorry that I dragged you out here...I was just so sure that I..."

"Hiccup." Stoick suddenly interrupted. Hiccup fell quiet once again, thinking his dad just wanted him to shut up and let him work.

"Hiccup!" Stoick said again, causing Hiccup to look up at him indignantly.

"I'm being quiet dad, what do you-" Hiccup complained, but then he stopped as he saw what his dad was looking at; a broken tree trunk that sat a little ways away from where they were standing.

"Oh...that's new." Hiccup said. Stoick didn't respond. Instead, he quickly began walking over to it, with Hiccup having to jog to keep up with the larger Viking's strides. Both Haddocks studied the trunk for a moment, before Hiccup spoke up.

"Uh, dad?"

Stoick looked over at his son, who was pointing over at a trail of broken branches, similar destroyed trunks, and a flat path of wet dirt. Hiccup started to follow it when he suddenly felt Stoick's hand grab his shoulder.

"Stay behind me Hiccup." Stoick said lowly, as he pulled a large dagger from his vest. He cursed himself for not having brought something larger to defend himself with, having not expected to find anything when they left, but a Viking made do with what he had.

Both father and son followed the path downhill, Hiccup trailing close behind Stoick. A little too close, for barely a moment later, his dad stopped without warning, causing Hiccup to walk straight into his dad's backside.

"Hey dad, for future reference, can you warn me the next time I might get hurt chasing your shadow?" Hiccup said as he rubbed his aching head. "I mean, isn't that your hobby by now?"

"Son, look." Stoick said, who was peering over a ridge.

Hiccup got on the ridge and looked over. A second later, he gasped and instinctively ducked down before getting the nerve to look again.

A large and sleek black dragon was tangled in ropes a little ways down from where the two Vikings were. It lay on its side, motionless, and if it weren't for the ropes, they would've thought it was asleep. Neither Stoick nor Hiccup had seen a dragon like it before. Therefore, it could only be one thing.

"A Night Fury." they both said simultaneously.

2. Fight and Flight

Chapter 2 " Fight and Flight

"A Night Fury..." Hiccup whispered, staring open-mouthed at the dragon below. "I...I actually..."

"...shot it down." Stoick finished for him, also looking down in disbelief at the dragon below. Stoick tore his eyes away from the dragon to look at his son, who despite having been the one to repeatedly assure him that he had shot it down in the first place, looked every bit as surprised as him.

Stoick put the dagger he was holding back in his vest and then climbed over the ridge, making his way down towards the Night Fury. Hiccup followed him after a moment of hesitation, and walked just behind. They stopped a few feet away from the dragon. Its eyes were closed, although the rise and fall of its chest indicated that it was still alive, but whether it was asleep or unconscious, neither Viking knew.

"Well, dad, you wanted a dragon." Hiccup said, attempting to break the uncomfortable silence. "Here it is."

Hiccup tried to look and sound like he had expected to find the dragon all along, when in truth, he knew it was just plain dumb luck that the two had come across it at all. Stoick didn't respond, instead continuing to stare down at the dragon, his expression unreadable.

"Son, this isn't just a dragon." Stoick said finally, his voice low and serious.

"Um...it's not?" Hiccup said, confused. "Because it sure looks like one to me..."

"This is a Night Fury, Hiccup." Stoic said. "Do you know what this means?"

"Uh...that I shot down a dragon?" Hiccup said, unsure of where his father was going with this.

Without warning, Stoick grasped Hiccup by the shoulders, and Hiccup found himself being excitedly shaken by the larger man.

"D-dad! W-what a-are y-you-" Hiccup said, trying to make sense of what his dad was doing.

"You've taken down a legend Hiccup!" Stoick said loudly, beaming down at his son. "You've managed to do by yourself what generations of Vikings couldn't!" He let go of Hiccup, who now felt a little woozy from all the shaking. "It was close, I had almost given up on you." he said, either not realizing or ignoring the unfortunate implications his words had. "I've prayed to Odin for something like this, and here you've done it, finally a true Viking before me! You might actually be able to become chief of the village someday!" Then Stoick paused, and laid a hand on Hiccup's shoulder.

"Hiccup." he said. "You've made me proud to be your father."

Hiccup gawked at his father, feeling like a great weight had been lifted from him. His dad was actually showing...appreciation. For him. All the failures, all the disappointments...those were a thing of the past now. Sure, there would be much more difficult things ahead in the road to becoming a chief, but for now, all he needed to do was just let his dad be proud of him and-

A loud growl suddenly emanated from the Night Fury, causing Hiccup to let out a yelp and trip over his own feet. Stoick yanked his dagger back out of his vest, holding it out towards the dragon, looking ready for anything.

"Looks like the beast still has some fight left in it." Stoick said after a moment. Hiccup picked himself up off the ground, and both he and Stoick looked at the dragon's head. A single, slitted green eye gazed back at them, conveying nothing but an inhuman loathing.

"Uh...it looks angry." Hiccup said uneasily as he looked down at the ground, unable to face the dragon's piercing glare.

"Dragon's don't have feelings, Hiccup." Stoic said brusquely, looking the dragon in the eye. "All they know is to steal and kill."

The Night Fury let out a hiss and began to struggle against the ropes around it. Both Viking's watched as it wiggled and squirmed, desperate to break the ropes. But they didn't budge, and after a minute, the dragon lay still, letting out a sorrowful whimper. Stoick remained impassive, while Hiccup shifted uncomfortably.

"Well, son..." Stoick said. "...time for you to finish it off."

"Huh?" Hiccup said, doing a double take. "You mean kill it? Right now?"

"Yes, Hiccup." Stoick calmly replied.

A pause fell between the two. The Night Fury eyed them warily.

"Hey, um, dad?"

Stoic turned to look at his son, who appeared to be strangely nervous.

"You think that maybe we can just...you know...take it to the holding cells?" Hiccup said, scratching the back of his head.

"No son, it's better you kill it now, while it's helpless." Stoic answered without missing a beat, turning back to the Night Fury, which snarled at him.

"But dad, wouldn't it that much cooler if I were to...you know, kill it in front of the entire village?"

Stoick turned his head slowly to face his son, his eyes narrowing.

"Do you want to kill this thing or not, Hiccup?" he said, growing irritated.

"But dad-"

"Hiccup." Stoic interjected, holding his hand up. "Your dragon. Your kill."

Hiccup let out a sigh. He opened his vest and took out his knife, turning towards the dragon, when suddenly Stoick stepped forward and grabbed the knife out of his hands.

"Not with this." Stoick said, placing his son's comparatively meager dagger in his vest. "Use this, a real blade." he said, holding his own larger weapon out to Hiccup, who took it hesitantly.

"You alright, Hiccup?" Stoick said, concerned.

"Yeah...yeah, I'm fine dad. It's just...things are going really fast." Hiccup said, trying to look confident.

"It's alright son, it's not going anywhere." Stoick said in a rare comforting tone.

Hiccup took a breath, and then stepped towards the Night Fury, holding the dagger in both hands. The dragon watched as the young Viking approached, until the boy stopped in front of its chest. Hiccup slowly raised the knife, the dragon closing its eyes and turning its head away in defeat. Hiccup lowered the weapon,

"Hiccup, what's wrong?" Stoick said, eyes creasing in confusion.

"I...I..." Hiccup stuttered, backing away from the dragon "...I can't do it dad."

Silence fell between the two, Stoick looking baffled, Hiccup looking anxious. The dragon opened its eyes, confused as to why it wasn't dead yet.

"What do you mean you can't do it?" Stoick said, his confusion giving way to anger.

"I...I can't kill it dad." Hiccup said, looking pitifully over at the Night Fury. "I...I just can't."

Stoick stood there, shocked, completely shocked, at what his son had just said. Everything they had gone through, all the years of watching his son try again and again to gain his acceptance...

"Hiccup." Stoick said, in a voice of forced calm. "You do realize this a dragon you are killing, right?"

Hiccup looked down at the ground and nodded.

"And you can also see that this a Night Fury? The most dangerous and deadly out of all of them?"

Hiccup nodded, still unable to face his father.

"But dad, I...I just..." he began.

"Look at me, Hiccup!" Stoick ordered. Hiccup looked up quickly, surprised at his father's outburst. "We've come too far..._I've_ come too far...for you to just throw this away." Stoick crossed his arms. "You are not leaving until this _thing_ is dead by your hand. Understand?"

Hiccup stared down at the dagger in the hands, conflicting emotions running through him. He looked for a moment like he wanted nothing more but to throw the dagger down to the ground. Then suddenly, it all gave way to a look of determination as he gripped the dagger and looked back up at Stoick.

"I understand dad." he said slowly, his voice dry. "I'll do it."

Stoick was surprised by his son's response, having half expected the boy to refuse again. But the look in Hiccup's face was clear. Perhaps nerves had just gotten to the boy for a second...understandable, considering the circumstances.

"Stand back dad...this thing's mine." Hiccup said unemotionally, turning and walking back towards the Night Fury. Stoick couldn't help but actually back away a few feet from his son, too busy wondering where this Hiccup had been all his life. Hiccup had never shown this type of attitude before, full of confidence and self-assurance. Maybe it had been deep down, buried somewhere underneath all the snarkiness, desperation, and un-Vikingness.

Hiccup stopped in front of the dragon yet again. It let out a sad groan, hoping that the boy would spare it again, but the look on the former's face didn't reassure. Hiccup took a deep breath, placing both hands on the dagger. He raised it into the air, straight over the dragon's chest. The dragon closed its eyes, waiting for death once again, a low groan of defeat sounding out. Stoick watched with baited breath as Hiccup brought down the knife...

...and began cutting away at the ropes.

"Hiccup!" Stoick yelled after a few seconds, unable to comprehend what he was seeing. "What do you think you're doing?!"

Hiccup didn't answer, continuing to cut open the ropes. The Night Fury's eyes widened as it felt a rope come loose. Then another...and another...

"No! Stop!" Stoick shouted, running forward to stop his son.

But it was too late. The Night Fury leapt up, knocking Hiccup back with a single spread of its wings. With a hiss, it pinned the boy down to the ground, who could do nothing but stare up in terror at the dragon. Then suddenly, the dragon's paw came off him as it fell to the side, for Stoick had tackled it with all his might. Stoick wrapped his arms around the beast's head as it tried to recover, and put all his strength into holding it down.

"RUN HICCUP!" Stoick cried. The dragon thrashed wildly around, snarling and hissing, trying to break free of the Viking's hold.

"Dad!" Hiccup yelled, picking himself up off the ground. He stared in horror at the sight of his father holding the offspring of lightning and death itself in his arms, knowing full well that if the Night Fury got free of his dad...

"JUST GO, HICCUP!" Stoick roared, throwing his full weight onto the dragon's neck. The dragon fell onto its side, its paws flailing wildly.

"I'll...I'll go get help!" Hiccup yelled back, before taking off through the forest.

Stoick watched his son go, wondering if this would be the last time he ever saw him. Then he shook his head and pushed those thoughts away, turning his attention back to the dragon in his arms.

"You know who I am, dragon?" Stoick said to the Night Fury.

The dragon snarled, still struggling to free itself of the Viking's iron grip.

"I AM STOICK THE VAST! CHIEF OF THE HAIRY HOOLIGANS!" Stoick roared back. "AND I WILL NOT DIE THIS DAY!"

The Night Fury found its footing and began to put its full effort into raising its head. As strong and heavy as Stoick was, even he found himself surprised at the dragon's strength. However, that didn't stop the Viking from thinking fast. Changing tactics, he let go of the dragon's neck and instead grabbed the beast's vulnerable ears. He twisted them as hard as he could, causing the dragon to cry out in pain and force its head down instinctively. It was a mistake, for Stoick slammed his foot into the Night Fury's head a second later. Stunned by the hit, the dragon attempted to yank its ears out of the Viking's hands, but ended up being rewarded for its efforts by yet another kick to its snout.

Throwing all caution to the wind, the dragon pushed through the pain and ran forward, dragging the Viking along beside it. Stoick used the momentum to climb onto the Night Fury's back, and the Night Fury bucked and jumped while Stoick struggled to hang on. Dazed, confused, and angry, the dragon raised its head back, leaping off its front paws to fall backwards, but Stoick punched the dragon back down. Desperate, the Night Fury rolled on its side, sending both dragon and Viking sprawling to the dirt. The Night Fury growled as it raised its head, and turned to face its foe, a blue flame forming in its mouth.

However, the Viking was nowhere to be seen. The Night Fury looked all around, confused, but only the trees filled its view. It shifted its eyes warily from side to side, preparing for anything.

Suddenly, a loud thud sounded from behind the dragon. Instantly, it turned around and shot a fireball, which hit a tree and obliterated the base of it. The tree fell backwards, landing hard against the ground. The Night Fury looked for any sign of a Viking among the destruction, but found none. Then it laid eyes upon a Viking helmet, and the dragon's eyes widened. It only got a second to be surprised, however, for Stoick jumped down from a tree above, helmetless, landing on the Night Fury's back. The Night Fury grunted at the impact, and began to shake itself wildly, then it froze as Stoick

sunk his son's knife into the dragon's shoulder. The Night Fury screeched as the man wrenched the knife out of its back, blood dripping off the blade. He readied the knife for another attack, but the Night Fury twisted its body around, forcing Stoick to hold tightly to not be thrown off.

The Night Fury had had enough. Spreading it's wings, the dragon attempted to take off into the sky, taking the Viking with it. But Stoick refused to let the dragon escape so easily. He raised the knife and again stabbed it into the Night Fury's back. The dragon had barely managed to get over the trees before it shrieked in pain and began falling back to earth. Branches whipped and broke across both dragon and Viking, before it slammed headfirst into a tree, sending both of them into free fall about twenty feet above the ground. Stoick held tightly on the dragon's back, while the Night Fury braced for impact, too dazed to do anything else.

They crashed into the earth, the dragon taking the full force of the fall. Stoick, while cushioned by the dragon's body, still felt the wind knocked out of him. The dragon groaned, its eyes shut, clearly exhausted and in pain. Stoick slid off of it's back, collapsing as soon as he touched ground, every muscle in his body aching.

Neither of them moved and nothing but the slow pants of both Stoick and the Night Fury filled the air for a moment. Stoick stared up into the sky, catching his breath. Today was so peaceful, but Stoick knew this was no time to rest; he had a dragon to kill.

Picking himself slowly off the ground, Stoick stumbled past the Night Fury's shoulder, eyeing the wounds he had made. Gripping the knife tightly in his hand, he continued until he stood in front of the Night Fury's head. The Night Fury opened one eye halfway, looking up at the Viking.

"Fought well, beastly." Stoick said coldly as he raised the knife. "But it's time to send you back to Hel where you belong." He let out a cry as he brought down the killing blow.

The dragon pushed itself backwards, barely dodging the blade. The knife sliced through the front of its snout, leaving a deep gash from the top of its left eye to below its mouth. Snarling viciously in both pain and anger, it pounced, knocking Stoick flat on his back. Stoick looked up in shock as the Night Fury placed both paws on his chest, blood dripping down from its gash onto his face. Opening its mouth, the Viking saw nothing but harmless gums...before two rows of sharp, glistening teeth suddenly forced their way out of them. The Night Fury lunged forward, aiming for the man's throat.

Stoick instinctively brought his hands up to block the Night Fury. Unfortunately, while his left hand managed to grab ahold of the dragon's snout, his right arm wasn't so lucky as the Night Fury's teeth sunk deeply into it. Stoick screamed in agony, louder than he had ever screamed in his life. The dragon bit down harder, its teeth digging deep enough into the Viking's flesh to scrape bone. Stoick continued to scream, his shrill cry deafening the Night Fury.

Stoick struggled as hard as he could, but it was to no avail, and soon his arms went limp, his free hand letting go of the Night Fury. The dragon continued to bite down against his caught arm, threatening to break the man's arm with how hard it was biting, but Stoick could

barely feel it anymore. Blood poured down from the wound, the Night Fury refusing to let go as it watched the Viking suffer.

The pain was too much for any man to bear, even for Stoick. He was tired, exhausted, and completely helpless. Going silent, the Night Fury watched the man lay his head down, turning away from the dragon. "Hiccup..." Stoick whispered, his vision fading. Then he passed out, and knew no more.

The Night Fury gave what looked like a smirk in satisfaction, its teeth stained red with the man's blood. It was over. The dragon had won.

"DAD!" a voice cried out from behind the dragon. Before it could react, a sharp object buried itself deep into the back of the dragon, near the base of its wing. The Night Fury howled in agony, finally removing its teeth from Stoick's arm. Not even bothering to see who its new foe was, it spread its wings, and with one powerful leap, it disappeared into the forest.

3. Unwanted Inheritance

Chapter 3 "Unwanted Inheritance"

Hiccup could hardly believe his luck as the dragon that he had just stabbed in the back flew away from him, impacting against a tree during its escape. He could only assume that its injured wing was responsible for its clumsy flight, and for a quick moment, he felt relieved and even a little proud of himself. But then he looked down at his father, whose body was splayed on the ground, blood covering his face and arms. Instantly, his feelings of pride gave way to growing panic and worry as he ran to his father's side, kneeling down next to the fallen warrior. Hiccup shook Stoick's body frantically, trying to get a sign of life from the fallen Viking. But none came, and Stoick remained where he was, the fierce scowl that usually permeated his features now replaced by an eerily calm visage that made him look much younger than usual.

Looking over at the man's arm, Hiccup had to hold back the urge to vomit at the sight of the mangled and bloody mess that remained. The boy had seen severe injuries before (he did live in Berk, so it was a bit of a given that you were bound to see something like this every once in a while), but there was something about seeing his own father, one of the toughest Vikings Hiccup knew, in such a horrible state that made Hiccup's stomach churn. A reflexive gag escaped Hiccup despite his best efforts, and he tore his eyes away from the grotesque injury to look at his father's serene, yet lifeless expression.

"Dad...wake up." Hiccup said.

Stoick didn't move.

"Wake up." Hiccup repeated, a little louder this time.

Stoick still didn't move.

"Dad, you're too stubborn to die before I do! Please just...wake up!" Hiccup yelled desperately, his eyes beginning to water from the tears

he was holding back.

But Stoick didn't respond.

Hiccup shot a glance back at his father's arm, eying the ripped flesh and fresh blood, which did nothing to help the nauseous feeling coming over him. Turning away from Stoick, Hiccup dry heaved violently into the grass, the sight of his dying father having finally gotten to him. For a minute, all he could do was retch painfully, his throat burning as he emptied his stomach of its contents. For a moment, the young Viking just sat there, conflicting feelings of grief, anger, and nausea building inside of him.

"Don't cry Hiccup." he ordered himself, trying to keep composed. "Vikings don't cry. Real Vikings don't...they don't..." His voice faltered, tears starting to stream down his cheeks as his feelings, the bane of every young Viking, broke him down.

"You can't be dead...you just can't..." Hiccup sobbed, wiping away the tears that stained his cheeks. He opened his bloodshot eyes and looked over at his father's body once more. "I'm sorry dad, I'm so sorry..."

The forest was quiet, only punctuated by the occasional sob or sniffle that came from Hiccup. A glint of light in the corner of his eye caught his attention, and he looked up, seeing the small dagger his dad had taken from him, covered in dried blood. Hiccup reached over and picked it up, studying it, his thoughts turning to the dragon whose blood stained the blade. The young Viking gripped the dagger in his hand tightly; if he ever saw that Night Fury again...

Suddenly, Hiccup was torn from his thoughts as a small chirp sounded from beside him. He turned slowly, stopping as a yellow Terrible Terror came into view, one that was nosing curiously at Stoick's feet. Hiccup wiped away the tears on his face, angry and more than a little annoyed at this intruder.

"Get away from him!" Hiccup yelled, grabbing a small rock and throwing it at the dragon, where it bounced off the latter's skull. The Terrible Terror jumped at the impact, and looked over at Hiccup, but after a few seconds, its attention went back to Stoick. The Terror studied the man's boot for a bit, and then began to lick it, liking the feel of the soft leather on its tongue. Hiccup would've laughed at the sight if he wasn't currently mourning his father's death. Instead, he lunged at the Terror with a cry of fury. The Terror let out a yelp and leaped back just in time before Hiccup's dagger impaled the ground where it had been standing just a second before.

"Stupid dragon! Leave him alone!" Hiccup said, too emotional to realize that he was speaking to a creature that couldn't understand him. The Terror looked at Hiccup for a long moment, one eye focused on him, the other looking towards the side, making it appear rather dim. Then without warning, it ran forward and jumped at Hiccup, who exclaimed loudly and ducked under it. The small dragon cleared over the boy and landed behind him, now next to Stoick's head. Hiccup turned, ready for anything, but his anger turned to exasperation as he saw the Terror sniffing his dad's unkempt hair.

"For the last time, go away!" Hiccup cried, pointing his dagger at the dragon. The Terror, growing annoyed at the human's interruptions, finally turned and hissed threateningly at Hiccup, making the latter freeze in place. Satisfied with the boy's reaction, it turned back towards Stoick, and licked the man's cheek a couple times in interest. The dragon let out a warble, as though it was it contemplating something. Then, it opened its maw and bit down lightly on the man's chin, beard and all. Hiccup was furious, thinking that the dragon was desecrating his dad's corpse, but he quickly calmed down as it became apparent that the dragon wasn't really doing anything. Its eyes were half-lidded, and its tongue visibly lapped at the man's beard, tasting the dirt and sweat. Hiccup shook his head, looking disgusted.

"You know what? Go ahead. Do what you want. I won't stop you." Hiccup said lowly to the Terror. "It's only my dad's body, what do I care what you do with it?!" he yelled, chucking the dagger away from him, where it rebounded off a tree and landed with an audible clink in the roots. Hiccup sat there and fumed, disappointed with himself. If he couldn't even stop a Terror from messing with his dad's corpse, what chance did he have of taking down a Night Fury?

"I really am useless, aren't I?" the young Viking said to no one in particular, his tone dry. The Terror didn't react to the boy's words at all, having seemed to forgotten the boy was even there as it drooled all over Stoick's beard. "Hope you're enjoying yourself." Hiccup said sarcastically, standing up and turning away from the dragon and his father, his chance to mourn in peace now lost. He had a long walk back, and it was better he got some help from the village in bringing the body back for a Viking burial.

A groan escaped him as he realized that the village would surely want to know what had happened to their beloved Chief, something that Hiccup was dreading to have to explain. What was he going to tell them? That he had freed a dragon, a Night Fury no less, out of pity? They would probably end up holding two funerals, one for his father, and one for him, the dragon traitor who committed fratricide. He could just make up a story, one on how the dragon broke free from the ropes and attacked then. But Hiccup was a notoriously bad liar, how was he going to lie to an entire village? The truth was bound to come out sooner or later, and when that happened, he was either going to be done for or shamed about it for the rest of his life.

Hiccup wiped away the last remaining tears on his cheeks and took a breath. It was better to hurry and get back before something more dangerous than a Terror came his way, although if a bigger dragon did happen to come by, Hiccup wasn't sure if he would avoid it or just beg it to kill him. Both Haddock's dying by dragon would be a much better legacy than him living as an outcast, the more he thought about it.

Suddenly, a loud ripping sound went through the air, followed by a startled yelp from the Terror, jerking Hiccup from his depressing thoughts for the second time that day. He turned around, ready to kill the annoying little dragon with his bare hands if he had to.

"You better not have done something...to...him..." Hiccup started to shout, but his voice grew quiet at the sight of a large scaly tail growing out of the back of Stoick's pants. Hiccup's eyes widened as

it grew gradually thicker and longer, extending quite a few feet. A small pair of fins grew out the sides of the thin end of the tail, along with another larger pair following a foot behind the length.

"How did...what...did you do this?" Hiccup said weakly to the Terror, which was watching these new developments with interest while also holding a mouthful of orange-brown hair. He looked back at Stoick, and saw that his father was now bald and baby-faced, his hair and beard having literally melted off. There was little time to ponder this, however, for Stoick's changes were just beginning.

The former Viking Chief's clothes strained against him as his whole body began to increase in size, his shirt and vest tearing and stretching, giving way to his rapidly expanding muscles. Small dark scales sprouted like mushrooms across his arms and legs. When they reached the remains of his arm, the grotesque injury disappeared beneath the dark avalanche moving across him. Both Hiccup and the Terrible Terror stood and watched, the young Viking horrified at what he was seeing, while the Terrible Terror, nervous at first, now appeared to be more than a little curious at the whole matter. At the point where Stoick's ears merged into his skull though, it squeaked and ran over to hide behind Hiccup, who either didn't notice or care as the Terror wrapped itself around his foot, continuing to watch what was happening from the safety of the young Viking's leg.

Meanwhile, Stoick's shirt and pants finally ripped apart at the growing mass, exposing the man's naked scale-covered body. Hiccup almost turned away from the uncomfortable display, but the urge to see what was happening overruled any urge to worry about his father's nudity at the moment. Stoick's fingers fused together, sharp claws unsheathing themselves from the paws that remained. The boots on his feet shredded open, his new toe claws tearing through the thick leather. His limbs inflated and stretched themselves into stubbier, smoother forms, his arms moving closer towards the front of his body as his shoulders merged into his chest. Audible popping and cracking noises filled the air as Stoick's bones rearranged themselves, making both Hiccup and the Terror flinch. At the same time, the Viking chief's face continued to morph into something unrecognizable, his lips and nose disappearing into the dark scaly mess. His skull expanded, his lipless mouth became wider, and his eyes, still closed, grew until they were about the size of small plates. It wasn't until frills and a couple of ear-like appendages grew out of Stoick's head that Hiccup recognized what his father was becoming.

"You can't be serious." Hiccup said, backing away. The Terror chirruped, still clinging to the boy's boot.

But the truth was clear to him as he watched his dad's body go through its final changes. Stoick's body stopped growing, many times larger than the already bulky figure it had been before. Small ridges formed on the man's back, getting smaller as they approached the back of his head and tail. Two large nostrils appeared on the snout that now adorned the former human's face. Finally, multiple teeth crew out of the fleshy, pink gums in his mouth, ones that were sharper than any humans. At the end of all this, Hiccup could only stare in horrified fascination at the creature that now lay before him.

"What...how..." Hiccup muttered, desperately trying to make sense of what he had just seen. He clutched his head in confusion, gripping his hair in his hands while the Terror looked up at him, wondering what was going to happen next. A moment passed, where the human failed to do anything but continue to stare unblinkingly ahead, mumbling incoherently. The Terror grew bored decided to make itself part of its own entertainment, stepping towards the creature. Hiccup looked down at the dragon, having actually forgotten that it was thereâ€|not that one could blame him after what he had just witnessed.

"Get away from it! I mean...him." Hiccup said, tentatively correcting himself just in time. Whatever had happened to Stoick's body, it was still his dad in there...right?

The Terrible Terror ignored Hiccup's warning. It was only a couple of feet away from the creature when suddenly both dragon and Viking jumped as a loud groan came from it. The small dragon scurried back to Hiccup, hiding behind his leg once more. Both human and dragon watched in fascination as the creature's eyes opened slowly, then closed again tightly. It rolled off its back onto its side, small grumbles coming from it.

"Dad?" Hiccup asked cautiously. He backed away a step when the creature looked up to face him, its large peering eyes looking exactly like his father's. Its paw reached out to Hiccup, whether out of recognizing the boy or simply out of instinct, the young Viking couldn't tell. Then suddenly, it whimpered and squeezed its eyes shut in pain, shaking its head from side to side. Hiccup was stunned to actually see a few tears run down the dragons snout before it lay still, panting in exhaustion. When its eyes fluttered back open, two green eyes looked at Hiccup, its slitted eyes looking exactly like those ofâ€|

"...a Night Fury." Hiccup whispered.

Just as that fact was beginning to sink in (and a whole slew of questions were forming in his mind), the Night Fury rolled onto its legs and stood up to face the young Viking, growling viciously. The Terrible Terror let go of Hiccup and took off into the forest in fear, its yellow scales apparently being symbolic of its nature towards potential threats. The boy himself was paralyzed, his heart beating a mile a minute, wishing that he hadn't thrown the knife away earlier. Not that it would've helped that much if the dragon decided to attack, but it would've been better than nothing. But the dragon didn't attack him, instead seeming to have forgotten the boy was there as it shook violently where it stood. The Night Fury's growls gave way to high-pitched screeches, apparently in some sort of pain. Even though Hiccup knew that an injured dragon was far more than dangerous than a healthy one, the young Viking stayed put where he was. It was then and there that Hiccup decided to do what would either be the bravest or the stupidest thing he had ever done in his lifeâ€|for the second time that day.

"Dad, it's me! Hiccup!" the boy yelled, struggling to be heard over the Night Fury's cries. "You know...your son?!"

The dragon suddenly went quiet and stared at Hiccup, shivering where it stood. Its eyes darted from side to side, blinking rapidly as though it was trying to adjust to a bright light. Whatever was

affecting it, it was obvious it was distressed in some way, and Hiccup thought he had a good idea why.

"Dad?" Hiccup said, taking a nervous step towards the Night Fury with a hand outstretched. "Is that you?"

The dragon stared at him, giving the boy a strange look. It slowly raised a paw towards Hiccup and opened its mouth, unintelligible sounds coming out of its throat. The Night Fury stopped and brought its paw back to its snout to confusion. Then it looked down at its paw, its confusion giving way to an unmistakable look of horror.

All of a sudden, a giant pair of wings suddenly erupted out of the Night Fury's back, audible cracks and pops filling the air as the Night Fury let out a scream. The wings extended themselves to their fullest wingspan and flapped, sending leaves and dirt flying everywhere. Hiccup watched in horror as the dragon eyes rolled to the back of its head, and it collapsed to the ground in pain.

"Dad!" Hiccup cried, rushing to the Night Fury's side. He reached a hand out and placed it on the Night Fury's chest, shivering at the feel of the tough, scaly hide. The dragon's body had a strange warmth to it, a comforting heat compared to the rather chilly Berkian air. He could hear heavy pants coming from the unconscious dragon, its chest rising and falling in tandem with its breathing. A steady heartbeat made itself known underneath the boy's palm, beating at a rapid pace. The dragon lifted its head once, attempting to get back up, but the pain of the transformation overcame it and it fell back, unconscious. Hiccup stepped back from it, not wanting to believe what he was seeing.

Something nudged Hiccup's leg, and he looked down to see the yellow Terrible Terror back at his feet, holding the bloody dagger he had thrown away in frustration a few minutes ago in its mouth. It laid the knife at the Viking's feet and looked up at the boy, its tail wagging excitedly. When Hiccup just continued to stare at the Terror in bewilderment, it let out a humph and nudged the knife with its paw. When Hiccup continued to stare at it cluelessly, it leaped onto the Night Fury's chest, thumping a paw against its chest, a not so subtle signal of what the Terror wanted for Hiccup to do. It appeared that nothing threatened the small dragon like that and got away with it.

Hiccup picked up the dagger, the Terror letting out an excited squeal as he did so, and eyed the blade. He looked back and forth between the two dragons and the dagger, looking like he was putting something together in his head. Then he looked up at the Terrible Terror, which was practically salivating at the prospect of witnessing the death of the much larger dragon. It was clear it just wanted to see something exciting, as long as it didn't have to be involved in the carnage.

"I'll be back...dad." Hiccup said sadly, putting the knife in his vest. The Terror tilted its head at the human in confusion, wondering why the scrawny Viking wasn't already cutting out the Night Fury's heart. It had searched long and hard (for a few seconds) for that dagger, and now it seemed like all its effort was going to go to waste. But before the Terror could even express its disappointment, the human took off running into the forest. The small dragon let out a confused warble. Then it shrugged and moved onto the Night Fury's

head, where it opened its mouth and began to tug at the Night Fury's ear playfully, already forgetting what it was supposed to be upset about.

All the while, the Night Fury slept peacefully.

...

The village had swiftly returned to normal since the dragon attack. A couple houses had been destroyed, and there had been a few minor injuries here and there, but overall, the raid hadn't been anything Berk couldn't handle. Compared to other attacks, it had been pretty tame, or at least, that was what Gobber thought as he hammered away at a freshly forged sword.

If there was one thing that Gobber regretted though, it had to have been leaving Hiccup by himself to look after the forge during the attack. The boy was already prone to finding trouble, so leaving him unsupervised in the middle of a dragon raid was just inviting trouble to step in and guide the boy towards an early grave. Gobber shook his head and slammed the hammer down in frustration, resolving never to let his bravado overcome common sense again. What had he expected to accomplish with joining the fight, anyway?

He could only hope Stoick wasn't too angry with Hiccup right now. The two hadn't come back from their little trip into the forest, and considering that it was now almost noon, it wasn't a good sign. Granted, Hiccup wasn't his son, but he had known the young Viking since he had been born. Stoick was a great chief, but when it came to being a father...well, it wasn't his place to judge, since he wasn't a father himself. Hiccup and Stoick had their relationship, and it was probably best to leave it as it was.

"Aye, Valhallarama, you left too soon." Gobber mumbled to himself, leaving that as his final thought on the matter. He set his hammer down and studied his handiwork. The sword was done, another fine piece of work.

A loud creaking sound came from behind the blacksmith, a signal that someone had opened the door to the forge. Gobber had been meaning to get around to fixing the door's hinges, but he had grown to like having a clear sign that someone was coming in, usually Hiccup. It gave him a chance to start putting away the more dangerous tools and weapons lying around the forge before the boy could hurt himself. There was no point in tempting fate after all.

"That you, Hiccup?" Gobber said, still studying the sword.

There was no answer.

"Lad?" Gobber asked again, turning around to look at the newcomer. Then his eyes widened in surprise.

Hiccup was standing there, but the expression on his face was one that Gobber had never seen before on him. The boy looked absolutely traumatized, his eyes staring unblinkingly at the floor, and he was panting heavily, his forehead drenched in sweat. He looked to be on the verge of fainting, and his body was visibly shaking, whether due to the cold or something else, Gobber couldn't tell. Dirt covered the boy, and a few small leaves and twigs were visible in Hiccup's

disheveled hair.

"Hiccup." Gobber said, setting his sword down and trudging over to the boy, the latter of whom didn't seem to notice the Viking walking towards him. "What's the matter?"

Hiccup didn't answer. He simply remained where he was, still looking as though he had seen a ghost.

"Hiccup!" Gobber yelled, placing his hand on the young man's shoulder. Hiccup jumped at the touch, his body ceasing its shaking. His eyes looked up to meet Gobber's, who looked worried.

"Gobber?" Hiccup said dumbly. "I...I...oh Odin, I-"

"Here lad, come on in, let's get you off your feet. You look like you're about to-"

"No!" Hiccup yelled, cutting the blacksmith off. "Gobber, I need to...I-I mean we need to...dad's..." he trailed off, his mouth hanging open as he struggled to find what he wanted to say.

"Calm down, laddie, I'm not going anywhere. Now, where's Stoick?"

"Stoick?" Hiccup asked, like he didn't recognize the name. Gobber raised an eyebrow and smiled.

"Yes lad, you know Stoick? The Vast? Chief of the Hairy Hooligans? Your father? The one you've been trying to impress since you've been able to walk?" Gobber said, growing more sarcastic with every question. Hiccup stared at Gobber for a moment with a confused look. Then tears began to form in the boy's eyes, his expression becoming sorrowful.

"Whoa lad, take it easy!" Gobber exclaimed, caught off guard by the change in Hiccup's demeanor. "I was only joking!"

"No, it wasn't that, it's just..." Hiccup said, wiping his eyes with the back of his sleeve, trying not to let himself break again. "Dads been...he's been..."

"What? What about Stoick? Out with it, laddie!" Gobber said, concerned.

"Dad's been..." Hiccup began, pausing as he took a breath. "...he's been...attacked."

"Attacked?" Gobber repeated, his eyes widening in surprise. "By what? Whom?"

"I...I set the dragon free and-"

"What dragon?" Gobber interrupted. "Wait, do you mean the one you were talking about? You mean you actually-?"

"Yes Gobber, I shot down a Night Fury!" Hiccup said angrily. Gobber clammed up, shocked to see the boy this agitated. "I'm sorry, Gobber, I just-" Hiccup said regretfully, and he meant it.

The older Viking waved it aside. "It's alright lad. Now, where's Stoick? Is he alright?" Hiccup took a deep breath and began to explain.

"Dad and I found the N-Night Fury in the forest, and...and it was t-tied up from the bola launcher. Dad asked me to kill it...b-but I didn't. I couldn't...at the time." Hiccup stammered. He waited, expecting a question from Gobber, but the latter said nothing, instead motioning for the boy to continue.

"I...I cut the ropes off the dragon..." Hiccup said, noticing that the blacksmith frowned, but seemed to think it was more important to let the boy finish. "The dragon attacked me, but dad tackled it and told me to run. I did, I was gonna get help, but then I heard the dragon screaming in the air, and saw it flying with dad on its back. I ran to where I saw them crash, a bit away from where I was. I heard dad screaming..." Hiccup took another deep breath, trying to keep calm. "...the dragon was...enjoying its kill." he finished darkly, his sad eyes looking into Gobber's. The blacksmith flinched at the implied answer, but otherwise didn't respond.

He looked towards the door, almost like he was expecting Stoick to come in and announce that this was all a big joke. But the moment passed, and Hiccup was still waiting for a response. Another moment of silence passed between the blacksmith and the young Viking. Then Gobber stepped past Hiccup, who watched Gobber lean out the door.

"Aye! Get a search party together!" he said loudly. "Tell them to meet by the edge of the forest, I'll be out shortly."

Gobber closed the door to the forge. Then he stepped over to the forge's window, closing it, something he rarely did due to the heat of the place. The blacksmith sighed and turned to face Hiccup, who looked back at the larger Viking, who was still waiting to see what the former would say.

Suddenly, Gobber stepped forward and embraced the young Viking in his arms. Hiccup was surprised, and at first tried to pull away, not wanting to be seen in such an emotional act with the blacksmith. But then he realized that was exactly why the blacksmith had just closed the door and windows, and hugged the larger Viking right back.

"I'm sorry, Hiccup." Gobber said. "Your father was a good man."

Hiccup remained quiet, watching the slowly burning embers of the forge. For a few seconds, neither of them spoke. Then Gobber released Hiccup, and both of them looked at each other, unsure of what to say.

"Is there anything...left?" Gobber asked, looking like he was sorry that he had to ask something like this from the boy. Hiccup pondered the question for a bit, which looked to Gobber like the boy was trying to work up the courage to answer the question.

"No. No, there isn't." Hiccup said, his expression grim. "But..."

"Yes?" Gobber asked, wondering what else the boy had to say.

"...I know where the dragon is." Hiccup said, a weird look of satisfaction crossing his face. Gobber looked at Hiccup strangely, his eyes peering down at the boy.

"Lad, it's a Night Fury, it's probably long gone by now." Gobber said, kind of hoping that would be the end of the conversation. No such luck apparently, for Hiccup still had that look.

"It's in the forest..." Hiccup said, reaching for something inside his vest. "...and it's not going anywhere anytime soon."

"And why's that?" Gobber asked, almost scared of the answer. Then his eyes widened as Hiccup pulled a bloody knife out his vest pocket.

"Does this answer your question?" Hiccup said, shaking the knife a little to emphasize his unspoken point.

"You killed it?" Gobber asked, astonished at the revelation.

"No, it's still alive...barely." Hiccup answered, placing the knife down on the table nonchalantly, trying not to laugh at Gobber's awestruck expression. He was finding this to be much easier, and even a little more fun, than he thought it would be.

"But Gobber..." Hiccup took a deep breath, preparing for what was coming "...I want the dragon to go to the holding cages."

"But Hiccup, this is a Night Fury we are talking about here." Gobber said disbelievingly at the boy. "Why in Odin's name do you want this thing alive?"

"Because I want it to be fully capable of defending itself, that's why." Hiccup said eagerly. Gobber looked confused for a moment, but quickly realized what Hiccup meant by what he said.

"Hiccup, you haven't even started dragon training." Gobber said, desperate to change the boy's mind. "How are you going to kill the creature that murdered your father, who need I remind you, is-" he paused for a second, looking sad. "-was the real dragon killer?"

Hiccup's smile melted away, replaced by a scowl that Gobber could have sworn looked just like his father's. "Because I watched that thing kill and eat him right in front of me!" Hiccup yelled, grabbing the knife back off the table and slamming the blade into it. Gobber stared at the upright blade, surprised by this show of anger, while Hiccup held in the pain he was feeling in his wrist. "Look Gobber, you'll have plenty of time to talk me out of this later, but right now, I know what I want!" Hiccup said angrily, leaving Gobber shocked at the new bloodthirsty Hiccup before him. "Now will you help me bring this thing in or not?" the boy asked, looking defiant as Gobber stood there, unsure of what to do.

The door opened, and Snotlout walked inside. He laid eyes on Hiccup, and looked slightly little taken aback at the sight of Hiccup's fierce glare, but he turned away to look over at Gobber.

"Um, the search party's ready Gobber." Snotlout said. "Although, my

dad's asking...what are we searching for?"

Gobber looked over at Hiccup, looking a little hesitant to answer, but the young Haddock shot a look of determination at the blacksmith. Gobber let out a sigh. He never thought he would miss the timid, neurotic boy Hiccup had been before.

"A Night Fury." Gobber answered. "And we're bringing it in alive."

4. Awakening

Chapter 4 "Awakening"

"I'm sorry for your loss Hiccup." yet another Viking said to the boy, who nodded slowly while holding in his irritation. He had grown tired of everyone giving him their sympathies, and was now giving them the bare minimum of acknowledgment. Anxiety overruled politeness at the moment, and there was plenty for him to be anxious about. The search party he was accompanying was already getting pretty deep into the forest, and he was scared over what might happen when they found his father. Considering the people searching were also trained dragon killers who didn't know, and wouldn't believe, that their Chief was now a dragon, he had no idea what to expect when they finally reached him.

A hand on his shoulder startled Hiccup out of his thoughts, and he jerked his head around to see Gobber again. The blacksmith looked determined, but when he looked at Hiccup, his expression turned solemn. Hiccup wished he could have told the man the truth about what had happened, to at least let him know that his best friend was still alive in some way.

"Are you alright lad?" Gobber asked him, the first time the blacksmith had spoken to him since they had entered the forest. Hiccup nodded and looked down at the ground.

"Yeah." he replied, rubbing the back of his head. "I'm doing ok."

"You're shakin'." Gobber said, patting the boy's shoulder.

Hiccup kicked himself inwardly for being so obvious. With a sigh, he ran a hand down his face. "I'm just a little nervous about seeing it again, that's all."

Gobber nodded. "I understand, it's not everyday that a Viking has to see a loved one go so horribly. But at least we can kill the dragon before it-"

"NO!" Hiccup interrupted, startling everyone. The entire search party turned towards him, and Hiccup looked around at the confused expressions before continuing. "I mean, don't kill it, is all I'm saying."

"But why?" a man asked behind him, and Hiccup turned around to see his cousin's dad, Spitelout, with arms crossed. "Isn't that why we're put here, to find this thing and kill it while we have the chance...IF we have the chance?" A murmur of agreement went through

the crowd, and Hiccup's mind whizzed for a justification to give him, but before he could say anything, Gobber stepped up.

"He took the dragon down, and he deserves to take its life if he wants." Gobber said.

"Well, alright then...but if that thing is loose, I ain't holding back, and it would be a fool's errand for any of us to do the same." Spitelout said, looking around at the rest of the villagers. The way he was carrying himself, it was clear that he considered himself the one in charge.

Gobber nodded coolly at this, but Hiccup's heart was beating against his chest at a rapid pace. He couldn't be sure that the Night Fury was still unconscious after all this time. What if his dad was awake now? Would it still be his dad in there when they found it? What if there was nothing left of his dad inside of that thing, and instead it was just a feral beast just waiting to ambush them...

"Hiccup?" a familiar voice said behind Hiccup. He turned around to lay eyes on Snotlout, and he nearly did a double-take at the expression on his cousin's face. Rather than that unbearable sneer he usually had, Snotlout looked sympathetic, which he had never seen before. "Hey, I uh...just wanted to say it's sad what happened with...well, you know."

Hiccup blinked twice, unsure of what his cousin was talking about for a moment, then he shook his head. "Oh...yeah. Thanks." he said, a bit more meaningfully than he had with the rest of the villagers. It wasn't everyday Snotlout showed genuine sympathy after all.

"I mean, I can't imagine what it must have been like. Just watching your dad get eaten alive by a dragon, and you can't do anything about it." Snotlout said, shaking his head. "Sucks to be you right?"

Hiccup deadpanned. "Yes, because being me is such a desirable thing at the best of times."

Snotlout just nodded, not appearing to have gotten Hiccup's sarcasm. "So...how'd you do it?"

"What?" Hiccup said, confused by the question.

"The Night Fury, how'd you take it down?" Snotlout asked.

"Oh, well uh...I used my bola launcher." Hiccup answered.

"Well, I know that...but what about when it broke free?"

Hiccup opened his mouth to answer, but nothing came out. He noticed that Gobber had turned his head, apparently listening in on this conversation. The thing was, Hiccup really hadn't thought of a decent explanation for how he had managed to keep a dragon contained, especially when considering he had already told Gobber it had broken free and killed his father, one of the toughest Viking's around.

"I...I really don't know." Hiccup said, rubbing the back of his head. "I just kinda...blanked out, and the next thing I knew, I saw the

dragon unconscious in front of me, and a bloody knife in my hand."

"Huh." Snotlout said, eyes wide and looking impressed. "So you're a berserker now...nice."

"I am not!" Hiccup said defensively. Berserkers were Vikings who lost control of themselves during a fight, and weren't exactly seen as the most stable of warriors, as many tales were told of how they would tend to attack any target, not just their enemies. Considering Gobber's shocked look when he overheard Snotlout's words, Hiccup didn't want it going around that he was some kind of emotionally unstable teenager looking for a fight. Odin knew there would be plenty of Viking's who would push him just to see him in action.

"Well, how else do you explain it?" Snotlout said.

Hiccup paused, then huffed in annoyance, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't know, I don't remember. One moment there was my dad, then the next thing I know, there's an unconscious dragon in front of me, and a bloody knife in my hand." That was the truth, technically speaking.

Snotlout nodded, then he suddenly gave Hiccup a weird look.

"What?" Hiccup asked.

"Oh, well um...I just realized." Snotlout said. "I mean, you're taking the news of your dad's death pretty well."

Hiccup sighed. "I guess I am, though I did have plenty of time to get over it when I was heading back home." he said, though it wasn't his father's death he had had to get over.

Snotlout gave a small nod of acknowledgment, and a moment of silence passed between them. "Really sucks man, wish I could have been there. If I had been, that Night Fury wouldn't have stood a chance against me."

Hiccup raised an eyebrow at his cousin skeptically.

"What, don't believe me? If a scrawny guy like you could take it down-" Snotlout said, but then both boys stopped when they saw that Gobber and Spitelout had both stopped walking. They quickly moved around the two men, and Snotlout gasped while Hiccup's heart sunk.

The dragon was still unconscious, it's chest moving gently up and down as a Terrible Terror slept on it. Hiccup could hear more gasps coming from the rest of the search party as they quickly moved around to get a good look at the dragon

"By Odin...he really did shoot it down." Spitelout said, his eyes wide. His expression of surprise was mirrored by everyone, except for Hiccup, who was more nervous than ever. A hard slap on the back made Hiccup turn to see Snotlout grinning.

"Way to go Hiccup!" his cousin said. "Man, you really weren't kidding this time."

Hiccup rolled his eyes and turned back to his dad, stepping towards the man turned dragon. He took a breath, his mouth beginning to feel a bit dry.

"Alright, let's get this thing to the cages." he said, perhaps a little too quietly, as no one appeared to be listening as they continued to stare at the Night Fury in awe.

"HEY!" Hiccup yelled, trying to get the group of Vikings to pay attention to him. A small squeal behind him alerted the boy, and he turned to see the Terror waking up, wings flared and looking around at all of the humans that surrounded it, clearly afraid from the new audience. It slipped down the Night Fury's shoulders onto it's head, and leapt off, taking off into the air. Unfortunately, it seemed that this was enough to stir the Night Fury, and the dragon's eyes began to flutter open.

"It's waking up." Spitelout said through gritted teeth, and he pulled out his weapon, the rest of the Vikings following suit except for Snotlout and Gobber.

"Wait! STOP!" Hiccup said, putting himself in front of the Fury, arms outstretched. "Don't hurt it!"

Everyone eyed the boy warily, the tension growing as the dragon let out a pained groan.

"Hiccup, get out of the way." Spitelout said.

Hiccup didn't move. The dragon opened an eye, looking at the human in front of it. Then it got startled when it saw all the other humans around it, armed and looking ready to attack.

"Boy, you're going to get us all killed!" Spitelout said angrily.

"Don't hurt it, I promise it won't hurt you!" Hiccup said.

"Promise it won't hurt us?" Spitelout said, nearly laughing at what he was hearing. "Who the hell do you think you are? Some kind of dragon master?"

Hiccup stood there, unsure of what to do or even say. Should he just blurt out the truth in the hope that they would believe him? Or would that just makes things worse?

Then his heart skipped a beat when he heard a growl behind him. The boy whipped around, laying eyes on the dragon with a slight smile, happy to see his dad awake again. All he had to do was show them that his dad wasn't hostile, and everything would be ok...

...then the dragon growled, and he froze. Before Hiccup could even think of how to react, the dragon pounced, and for the second time that day, Hiccup found himself looking into the eyes of death itself. Time seemed to freeze as he looked directly into the slitted pupils of the Night Fury. No recognition was apparent in those eyes, nothing to indicate that it was Stoick. Just the cold fury of a dragon cornered, ready to take out it's anger on the young Viking.

"Dad." Hiccup whispered desperately. "It's me. Come on, show me you're in there somewhere..."

The dragon blinked. A few seconds ticked by, then the dragon blinked again, then a few more times, its pupils rounding out more with each blink. It's bared teeth retracted and it looked up, seeing all of the Vikings that surrounded it, this time looking like it recognized them all. Then it looked back down at the human beneath it, and Hiccup felt the pressure on his chest begin to ease off...

****CLANG****

The Night Fury was knocked to the side by a hammer straight to its skull, and it stumbled off the boy. It shook its head, confused warbling sounds coming from it, but it barely got a chance to even see its assailant before the hammer came down again.

****CLANG****

The dragon fell to the ground, unconscious once more.

Hiccup looked up at Gobber, who had his hammer raised at the ready, expression fierce. Nobody moved for a moment, a collective breath going through the crowd.

"Alright, let's get this thing tied up." Gobber said matter of factly. He looked over at Hiccup, who was just standing there, eyes wide, staring at the Night Fury. The blacksmith walked over and placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "C'mon lad, let's get you out of here. We need to talk."

Hiccup simply nodded, watching as ropes and nets were thrown across the Night Fury, and a muzzle was affixed to it. Paws bound and wings tied, it was harder than ever for Hiccup to look at the dragon and remember that it was still his father in that beast's body.

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The walk back to the village was a dreary one. Despite expressing a want to discuss things with Hiccup, Gobber ended up being mostly quiet. He asked if Hiccup was ok, but that was about it, though probably because Hiccup had only answered with a quick nod. The young Viking constantly turned his head around to look at the dragon behind them, who was being dragged rather uncaringly through the forest.

"Still want to keep it alive?" Spitelout said, walking up to Hiccup, who turned to face him. The latter hesitated for a moment before regaining his nerve.

"Of course, so what if it caught me off guard?" Hiccup said with forced nonchalance.

Spitelout shook his head. "Boy, you're going to get yourself torn apart if you keep this up."

Hiccup frowned, but otherwise let the conversation stop there. He turned to check on his father again, and was glad to see he was still unconscious. He'd have to tread lightly from here on out, as he had no idea how much of his dad was still in there for sure anymore, and

anymore mistakes like that would just make it harder for him to justify keeping the dragon alive. But at least one thing was for certain...

...his dad _was _in there. Somewhere.

5. Coming to Terms

Chapter 5 - Coming to Terms

"Lad, I know you're angry, but that's no reason to throw your life away trying to get revenge on a dragon." Gobber said. "I understand your frustration and..." he continued, before Hiccup tuned him out. The boy sighed as he fidgeted with the dagger on the table. They had returned from the forest and gone to his house, and it was here and now that Gobber had pulled out all the stops, having not stopped talking since they had arrived, endlessly trying to convince Hiccup to want the Night Fury alive. Of course, what the latter didn't know was that Hiccup had no intention of harming the captured dragon at all, but who could blame him?

"If that thing had killed me, dad wouldn't have rested until it was dead." Hiccup responded, balancing the dagger on the table, not even looking at the blacksmith.

"You're not your dad, Hiccup!" Gobber said exasperatedly. The young Viking suddenly felt kind of sorry for making Gobber so agitated, especially when he must be taking the news of Stoick's death, the man who Gobber had told Hiccup many times he considered a brother, rather hard.

Hiccup looked at Gobber, then back at the dagger, trying to look unsure. He had to make this convincing after all. "Alright, well...I don't want this thing just free to roam around. Especially now that we have it." Hiccup said.

Gobber sighed with relief, and Hiccup could tell the man was glad that he seemed to be reconsidering his future plans with the Night Fury. The man stepped forward and placed a hand on Hiccup's shoulder, clearly happy about the boy's 'decision'.

"Don't worry, we have it locked up good and tight." Gobber said. "It's not going anywhere."

Now it was Hiccup's turn to be relieved. He was still a bit shaken from the close call that had happened back in the forest. It had taken all of Hiccup's restraint to not blurt out the truth when that had happened; he doubted it would have helped to say his dad, their chief, was now as far as he knew a dragon. No one in their right mind would believe him, after all.

"I don't think it's safe to keep the dragon locked up for too long, Hiccup. Winter is coming up, and we barely have enough resources to care for the dragons we have now." Gobber said.

Hiccup's heart sank at the implications the blacksmith's words carried. He rattled his brain for a reason to justify keeping the dragon alive.

"Wouldn't it be better to carefully study it and record what we learn?" Hiccup said after a moment of thought. "I mean, this is a Night Fury we're talking about here after all. We don't know if there are more of them out there, might as well learn about them while we can." Hiccup said.

"And just who do you think would be brave enough to get near the thing?" Gobber asked.

"I can do it." Hiccup said. Gobber raised an eyebrow, clearly not convinced.

"Hiccup, I don't trust you alone with that Night Fury." Gobber said bluntly.

Hiccup opened his mouth to protest when suddenly there was frantic knocking at the door. Both Gobber and Hiccup exchanged puzzled looks before the former walked over and opened it, revealing an excited Fishlegs holding a large book in his hands.

"Oh, hi Gobber!" he said, trying to look over the blacksmith's shoulder. "Is Hiccup here?"

Gobber stepped aside, showing that Hiccup was indeed inside. As soon as Fishlegs saw him, the boy charged into the house, nearly tripping over himself in his rush to get to Hiccup.

"Hiccup, please don't kill that Night Fury!" he said, setting the book on the table that Hiccup was sitting at.

"What?" Hiccup said, not having expected Fishlegs to show up and demand something like this at all.

"I mean, you can kill it eventually if you want, just please not now!" Fishlegs exclaimed, almost pleadingly.

"Slow down, Fishlegs!" Hiccup said, leaning away from the other teen. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm sorry, it's just..." Fishlegs said, taking a breath to calm himself down. "...we've never captured a Night Fury before, and now we have one, thanks to you!"

"A Night Fury that killed the Chief." Gobber interrupted, his tone dry.

Fishleg's excitement evaporated, replaced by shock. "What? You mean, your dad is..." his voice trailed off, the boy looking horrified.

"Gone...yeah." Hiccup said, suddenly realizing that there were probably a lot of villager's who had yet to learn of his dad's death. Well, his supposed death anyway.

"Oh...well, um..." Fishlegs said, now feeling awkwardly out of place. "I...I'm sorry for just barging in like that. I didn't know..."

"It's alright." Hiccup said. "Actually, Gobber and I were just talking about what we should do with the dragon."

"Are you gonna kill it?" Fishlegs blurted, looking a little worried about the answer. "I mean, if that's what you're gonna do, I understand. I...I just think..."

Hiccup looked down at the book Fishlegs had laid open on the table, and saw that it was turned to a page that at the top was labeled 'Night Fury'. He realized this was the book of dragons, a record on all the information Berk had managed to scrounge together over generations of study. But the current page was practically blank, only giving a generic warning of the dragon. An idea suddenly formed in Hiccup's head.

"You wanted to study the Night Fury?" Hiccup asked, a small smile coming across him.

Fishlegs nodded, perking up a little. "This will probably be our only chance to get close to this thing...think about how great it would be to finally document a legend." he said, almost in awe at the thought.

Hiccup smiled at his suggestion, while Gobber frowned.

"If this thing is the only one of it's kind, we shouldn't have to worry about learning more about it." the blacksmith reasoned. Both Hiccup and Fishlegs looked at each other, raised an eyebrow each, then pounced on Gobber's statement, voices overlapping one another as they spewed a stream of arguments.

"-a duty to the tribe..."

"-if there's two?"

"-our only chance..."

"-something more dangerous..."

"-teach others how to..."

"-you never know..."

"ALRIGHT!" Gobber shouted, making both boys fall silent and smirk at one another. "By Thor, you're givin' me a headache. Fine, we'll keep the dang dragon...ALIVE!" he added, seeing Hiccup about to ask.

"And we can study it?" Fishlegs asked, looking excited again.

Gobber rolled his eyes, and opened his mouth to respond.

"Even if you say no, Gobber, you know we'd just go on our own anyway. Might as well let us." Hiccup said.

Gobber narrowed his eyes at the two. Fishlegs looked away, trying to look like he would never do such a thing, while Hiccup stared back at the man, daring Gobber not to believe him.

"Alrigh' then, you two can study, but only under supervision." he said. "Don't need you two doing anythin' stupid with it."

Fishlegs pumped a fist and whispered "Yes!", but Hiccup actually had

mixed feelings about the decision. On the one hand, he now had a way to get close to the dragon without looking suspicious. But on the other...he did need some time alone with it, at least until he could confirm that it was still his-

"Everything ok, Hiccup?" Fishlegs asked, knocking Hiccup out of his thoughts. The young Viking blinked and looked up the other boy, and realized he was clutching the dagger hard and pushing it into the table. He relaxed and placed the dagger inside his vest, suddenly getting a flashback to when he had stabbed the other Night Fury in the back.

"Yeah...I'm fine." he answered unconvincingly, though it didn't seem to matter that much to Fishlegs, who turned to Gobber.

"Can we go see it now?" Fishlegs asked excitedly, bouncing on his feet.

"No." Gobber replied bluntly. Fishlegs face fell.

"But you said..."

"You can do whatever you wan' with it, but not now. There's too many things I have to take care of before I can worry about you two. We have a dead Chief, a live Night Fury, and a whole bunch of confused Vikings who are still learnin' about both."

"Oh, alright then." Fishlegs said disappointedly, while Hiccup cursed quietly to himself. "Who's gonna be the new chief?"

Hiccup's heart leapt as the question. He hadn't even thought about that, and while it really didn't matter to him who became the new leader of the tribe, it was still a blow to know that his dad would no longer be the one in charge.

"Haven't decided that, and it's not up to me." Gobber answered.

"If you had to guess, who do you think will be chosen?" Hiccup asked.

Gobber thought for a moment. "I suspect Spitelout will be the crowd favorite. He rarely divulged from Stoic's decisions, and he was second in command when your dad wasn't around, so yeah, him."

Hiccup looked down and nodded, feeling a sudden tug in his chest. Things were already changing faster than he thought they would, and he hadn't even gone to see the Night Fu-his dad yet.

"You ok Hiccup?" Fishlegs suddenly asked.

Hiccup wanted to say no, nothing was ok. In fact, this was the most miserable day in his life, and he was tired of it. Nothing made sense, it was like a nightmare, except in a real nightmare, he would have just been attacked by a dragon, not watch helplessly as his dad became said dragon, and then get taken captive by his own tribe.

"Yeah, I'm fine Fishlegs." Hiccup said, standing up. "I just...need some time to think." The young Viking headed towards the stairs, taking them slowly while rubbing a hand through his hair, deep in

thought. Fishlegs eyed him worriedly, conflicted as to whether he should say anything or not, but then his thoughts were interrupted when the blacksmith laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't worry. He's just lost a father, give him time." Gobber said. "Everyone goes through this at some point."

Unbeknownst to Gobber, Hiccup had heard the latter's words, and he felt a pang of sorrow go through him. He couldn't decide which was worse; that everyone thought his dad was dead, or that only he knew the truth.

"By the way, Gobber." Fishlegs said. "How did the Night Fury get captured?"

Gobber was about to respond that Hiccup had done so when he suddenly realized that he had no idea. How had Hiccup taken down a Night Fury all by his lonesome? He remembered Hiccup telling him that he had done...something or another back at the smith, but he had seen the dragon with his own eyes, and there was nary a scratch on it.

"I don't know." Gobber finished, leaving Fishlegs looking confused as the larger Viking pushed him out the door.

...

Hiccup opened the door to his room, stepping inside and closing it behind him. He kicked his boots off and sat on his bed, clasping his face in his hands. The day wasn't even half over, and already Hiccup was exhausted, both physically and emotionally. A cold draft went through the room, making Hiccup shiver. He looked up to see that the shutters to his window were open, which left him puzzled, as he never left his window open when he left. Shrugging it off, he got up and closed the window, then turned around and dropped onto his bed, splaying out on the mattress.

A loud muffled squeal rang through the air, and the boy exclaimed, feeling his blankets shifting beneath him. He shot up and backed away towards the wall, watching as his sheets writhed around until a familiar yellow Terror poked his head out, laying its eyes on Hiccup. The two stared at each other for a moment in surprise, then the small dragon huffed and threw the covers back over itself, leaving the young Viking standing there with a hand over his heart, breathing heavily.

Hiccup recovered after a few moments, frowned, then approached his bed, grabbing the blanket and pulling it off to reveal the Terror again, which was curled up with its eyes shut. The dragon opened one eye, saw it was Hiccup, and closed it again. The young Viking suddenly realized that this was the same Terror from back in the forest, the one that had messed with the Night Fury,

"Would you get out of here?!" Hiccup yelled.

The Terror hissed lowly, almost as if it was saying "Make me."

Hiccup huffed; he wasn't in the mood to be dealing with this sort of crap right now. The last thing in the world he wanted to think about was dragons, and yet here one was, apparently calling his own bed for

itself. He was half tempted to hand this thing over to his dad and-

Hiccup stopped, feeling a guilty pang go through him. For a moment there, he had completely forgotten about his father. He could only imagine what he could be going through right now.

Hiccup sat down on the other end of the bed, wondering if his father was even awake. What could he be thinking right now?

...

He let out a groan as he woke up, his head throbbing painfully in greeting. His ears were ringing as well, with noises sounding loud, yet far away. Gritting his teeth, he tried to stand up, only to find that there was something tying him down, resisting his efforts.

"Looks like it's waking up." a voice said, although he could barely make it out.

"'Bout time." another voice said. He opened his eyes, but the darkness remained. "Gobber must have really given it a beating for it to stay out that long."

"I don't believe it...a young weakling like him, taking down a Fury?" the other voice questioned. "How'd that happen?"

"Maybe he's got a bit of berserker in 'im?"

There was silence for a moment. Then both voices burst into hearty laughter.

He growled, knowing they were talking about his son...then he abruptly stopped, realizing what he was doing. He tried to stand up again, but whatever was on his back wouldn't budge. He raised an arm to take it off, only to be stopped when he felt something holding his arm down as well. A snarl escaped him, and he froze when he heard that come from his own mouth, along with the laughter outside ceasing instantly.

Loud bangs sounded out, like someone was pointing on a door. "Shut up in there! Stupid dragon."

"What?!" he cried. "I am no dragon, I am Stoic, Chief of the-" he stopped talking, when he heard no words come from himself, instead hearing a combination of warbles, growls, and snarls.

Another loud bang. "Quiet!"

"So...I heard that the Chief's dead." a man said, after a moment had passed of Stoic remaining dead silent.

"A sad day to be a Hooligan, that's for sure." the other man responded. There was a moment of silence, and Stoic struggled again to stand up. "Who do you think is gonna replace him?"

"Who can?" the first man said. "Stoic was one of a kind."

There was a pause.

"My money's on Spitelout."

"Yeah, same here."

Stoick huffed. Spitelout being chief of the village? Over his dead body! But then, the way these two men were talking about him...was he?

Stoick kept his eyes open, knowing that eventually he would be able to see through the darkness. A minute passed, and he struggled against the bonds holding him continually. He could feel a little give on the ones for his paws; apparently, whoever had tied these hadn't checked. But what frustrated him was that his fingers didn't seem to be moving how he wanted them to. In fact, his whole body just felt distinctly off, like it wasn't his. He looked down at his hands, his eyes finally having adjusted...

...only to do a double take when instead of hands, he saw claws.

"No..." Stoick said to himself, a warble coming out instead of words and making him flinch as it slowly dawned on him of what had happened. "No...it can't..it can't be..."

Despite not being able to talk, his own thoughts pieced together all the clues. Even quick memories flashed back to him, of his son looking worriedly at him, of Hiccup and the tribe all looking at him fearfully. Of Gobber's angry, determined expression as a hammer came down upon his head. And now here he was, bound up and held inside of a prison. And now that he looked around again, he recognized it for what it was...a cage. A dragon's cage.

There was no doubt about it. He, Stoick the Vast, Chief of the Hairy Hooligans...was a dragon.

****Reviews are welcome and appreciated.****

6. A Moment to Think

Chapter 6 "A Moment to Think"

Hiccup stared out the window, resting his head on one hand. A sigh escaped him, and he leaned back in his chair, running a hand down his face. He had been thinking on what to do for what felt like hours, but his mind just wasn't working the way he wanted it to. Heck, he didn't even know what he wanted to do, his options were painfully limited.

If he kept his dad under lock and key in the cages, then he at least knew where he was. But there was no telling how long he would stay there, as captive dragons weren't kept for long on Berk. On the other hand, setting him free would erase that problem, but that was worse. First there was actually getting his dad out, which admittedly wasn't too hard given that the dragons weren't kept under supervision most of the time, but Hiccup was more afraid of what his dad would do when he did get out.

A flashback of those green slits staring into his own hit Hiccup. He

wanted to believe that his dad was still in that body, but both times he had seen the dragon awake, it had started out hostile. What if he released it and it simply killed him on the spot? Or worse yet, he releases the most dangerous dragon on the island, it spares him, but it harms or kills someone else? Hiccup would never forgive himself, and he doubted the other Vikings would either.

A snore from his bed interrupted Hiccup's thoughts. He grunted in annoyance and turned his head to see the Terror still sleeping on his mattress. He hadn't bothered to try and move the dragon yet, as he had been too busy thinking about his situation.

"Come on, Hiccup." he said to himself. "Think! What would dad do?"

Hiccup considered the question. If it had been him that had been turned into a dragon, what would his dad have done? Kept him alive? Or killed him when he had the chance? Hiccup shuddered at the very thought of it; as much as he loved him, he had to admit that if his dad was in his position...

"Not helping." Hiccup muttered to himself. He let out a cry of frustration and kicked the wall, forgetting too late that he had taken his boots off. His cry of pain went through the room, and a small squeal of surprise signaled that he had woken up the Terror.

"Great, just what I needed." Hiccup said, turning to see the Terror staring at him with what looking like irritation. "More dragons."

The Terror yawned and licked its snout. Then it got up and stretched, first its front and then its back, shaking its head to wake itself up fully. It eyed Hiccup curiously, letting out a warble.

"Quiet, I'm trying to think." Hiccup hissed at the dragon. The latter humphed in response and turned so that its rump faced toward Hiccup. Laying down, it closed its eyes again.

Hiccup shook his head at the sight, then turned to look back out the window. He watched for a bit, seeing the villagers going about their daily lives, none of them having a clue of what had really happened to their chief. The boy cursed himself yet again, feeling regret at what he had done. He almost wished his dad had really died back in the forest...

Hiccup kicked himself for thinking such a thing, and then stood up. He walked to the door, slipping on his boots quickly. The Terror looked up at him, tilting its head at the boy.

"Headed out for a walk...don't mess things up." Hiccup said sarcastically to the small dragon. The Terror blinked, then went back to laying down on the bed, shrugging disinterestedly.

...

Stoick had been laying where he was for what felt like ages now. He knew he should be trying to escape his bonds and try to find a way out of this. But that was just it, there was no way out. Even if he did break free, he was done, his life as a Viking, as a human being,

was over. He had confirmed it during those few moments of panic he had experienced not too long ago, looking himself over. The claws, the paws, the scales...the worst part of it was when he had fallen over onto his wings.

His wings...just thinking about it made him feel sick. None of this could be real, none of it should be real. But as the seconds ticked by, Stoick could still feel this body. It all felt wrong, so wrong. He felt dirty and defaced, like Loki himself had come along and taken everything from him, replacing it with what he had now as a cruel joke. Except he couldn't imagine anyone, not even a trickster, would have found this funny. He certainly didn't.

"It's gotten quiet hasn't it?" a voice said from outside. Stoick looked up at the sliver of light that shined through the dark, a small opening in the wall that separated him, the beast, from the men outside.

"Has been for awhile now, guess its finally learned there's no point in struggling." the other man said. Stoick chuckled darkly; he had actually loosened the ties on his paws quite a bit already, he just hadn't bothered to take them off.

"So what do they plan to do with it?" the first man said. Stoick listened intently.

"Hel if I know, but if it were up to me, I'd march this thing out into the middle of the village and put a knife through it. Then probably put its head on a stake for the others to see." the second man replied. Stoick winced at the thought, and considered that he should probably look for a way out again.

"Huh, can't say that's a bad idea." the first man said. "It's crazy to think that boy captured this thing."

"Who?"

"The chief's son."

Stoick did a double take, and he put all his effort into listening to the conversation.

"Yeah, I was one of the few who went into the forest looking for the thing, and that boy stopped the rest of us from killing it while it was down." the first man said. "Nearly killed him."

"Huh, wouldn't that have been a shame. To lose both Haddock's to the same dragon, even if the boy is rather...well, Hiccup."

Stoick closed his eyes, hoping against hope that Hiccup hadn't been harmed. He couldn't remember much of what happened after that fight with the Night Fury, just the sight of those vicious eyes and teeth digging into his arm. Then Stoick's heart did a flip as he suddenly realized...that damn dragon had done this to him! That had to be it! It was all starting to make a weird sort of sense.

"Surprising the boy wanted it alive at all. If I was him I would have killed it, and hung its head on my wall."

For once in his life, Stoick was happy about the fact that his son

wasn't like other Vikings. But just thinking about his son made him feel grateful that the latter was at least alive and well. He wanted to see Hiccup badly, more than he had ever wanted before in his life. But why would his son want to see him now, as a dragon? The thought made Stoick depressed, and he let out a low croon that echoed through the darkness.

What he would give to see his son again.

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Hiccup walked slowly through the village, watching as fellow Vikings repaired damage from the dragon raid. A house burnt here, an injury being nursed there...he paused for a moment when he passed the tower that had fallen over and freed the captured Nadders, the ripped net still under it. He walked over and picked up one of the few scales glittering from the afternoon sun, left behind by the dragons. He turned it over in his hand, then dropped it to the ground, sighing.

"Hiccup?" a voice said behind him. Hiccup turned around to see Fishlegs standing there, looking surprised to see him, notebook

"Oh, hey Fishlegs." Hiccup said.

"What brings you out and about? I thought you were still at your dad's...I mean, your place." the other boy said, correcting himself quickly.

Hiccup sighed. "I needed some fresh air to clear my head, that's all." he replied.

Fishlegs nodded, looking at the collapsed tower for a moment. "That raid really did a number on the village."

"Yeah, I guess it did." Hiccup said, scratching the back of his head awkwardly. He wasn't in the mood to talk with anyone at the moment.

"So, if you don't mind me asking...what happened?" Fishlegs asked.

"Huh?"

Fishlegs blushed, but cleared his throat and continued. "What happened in the forest with your dad and the Night Fury?" he clarified.

"Oh." Hiccup said, looking surprised that Fishlegs out of all people had thought to ask. He turned to continue walking up the path, Fishlegs moving up to walk beside him as he began to explain.

â€|

"So you set the dragon free?" Fishlegs asked a few minutes into the conversation, after a long pause when Hiccup had told him when he had cut the ropes off the dragon. Hiccup nodded, looking away, feeling ashamed. "But why?"

"I don't know." Hiccup said. "I guess I just felt kind of...sorry for it."

"Hiccup, it's a dragon. You know what they are and what they do." Fishlegs said, with an uncharacteristic expression of disappointment at Hiccup for not realizing this simple fact. Hiccup felt a surge of anger go through him, though it wasn't directed at his friend.

"I know." he said, running a hand down his face. "I know it was a dragon and all, but the way my dad was pushing me to kill so fast and seeing it just ready to accept death...and now my dad's a-" he said, before suddenly stopping himself.

"Your dad's a...what?" Fishlegs said, with a raised eyebrow.

Hiccup felt his heart thumping in his chest. Should he tell Fishlegs? The latter would probably be more accepting of what he had seen than most, but there was no telling if the boy would eventually rat him out. Perhaps he should take a chance, share it with someone. It would probably make it easier.

"a dra...a dragon..." Hiccup whispered, eyeing the other boy warily.

Fishlegs looked confused. "What'd you say?"

"A dragon...a dragon's meal." he said, changing his mind at the last moment.

Fishlegs's expression darkened a little at the thought, and both boys went into a somber silence for a moment. "And you still don't want to kill the dragon? I mean, I still want to study it, but I wouldn't blame you now that you've told me that."

Hiccup sighed. "No...I don't want to kill it. Maybe visit it sometime though."

Fishlegs looked at Hiccup strangely, and opened his mouth, then closed it and shook his head. "You know Hiccup, you can be weird sometimes." he said.

Hiccup chuckled. "I guess I can be."

Another quiet moment passed. "So...what did you want to study on that Night Fury anyway?" Hiccup asked.

"Huh? Oh!" Fishlegs said, looking more like his usual eager self. "Well first thing would be to at least get down what the thing looks like in the book. And get it done by someone who can actually draw." he added, nodding towards Hiccup. "Have you seen the other illustrations? They look like a child drew them."

"Knowing this village, it probably was." Hiccup said, and both boys shared a laugh.

7. A Change of Mind

Chapter 7 "A Change of Mind"

Stoick frowned as he looked down at his paws, free from that bindings that had once held them together , which were now torn apart on the ground. Getting the improvised muzzle off had been easy after that, although he hadn't had any luck with getting the bonds off his wings. Not that he minded that so much, since he had little desire to even look at them, let alone try to figure out how they worked. Whoever had tied him up had done a really bad job of it, thank Odin.

A sigh left him as he thought about his situation. How many years had it taken him to learn how to be a decent human being? One that could use his size, strength, and smarts enough to lead his village? Now it was gone, taken away from him and replaced with this horrid body that he would have to learn all over again...if he could. Although considering that he was trapped inside a dragon's cage and assuming no one knew it was him, he wondered just how much time he had left.

Stoick turned and banged his head against the wall, the sound echoing through the darkness. He kept his head on it for a moment, eyes closed, trying to think of something to do. He had thought repeatedly that the common sense thing to do would be to try and escape. But even if he did, where would he go? He had no idea how to be a dragon, and damn it to Hel if he was to start acting like one!

He banged his head against the wall again, grunting from the unexpected amount of force he had applied.

"Oh QUIET you great big sack of-!" one of the guards yelled outside.

Stoick's pupils turned into slits, and he let out a roar of anger, which had suddenly filled him when he was reminded that there were two humans outside his cage. Ones that had imprisoned him in there, leaving him hungry and cramped in this dark desolate prison. Ones that he knew would kill him if they had the chance. Not that they would get that satisfaction, for as soon as he had broken free, he would take his chance and kill every human in his path and...and...

Stoick lowered himself to the ground and placed his paws on his head, wondering where his thoughts had gone. He felt like his human side had been buried for a moment there, smothered by another side of it made up of just...something else. Instinct perhaps? It was obviously something to do with his new body, and as he sat there trying to regain control of himself, he pictured his son in his mind once more..what was his name? Hiccup, that's right.

He let out a groan; every moment that passed inside this damn body, he felt like he was losing himself. He felt helpless to it all, and for the first time in what seemed like forever, Stoick didn't know what to do.

â€|

"So...when do you plan on going to see it?" Fishlegs asked Hiccup as both of them walked up to the latter's house, having toured the village while chatting here and there. It had been a good way for Hiccup to relax, just being able to talk to someone, even if it was listening to Fishlegs go on about stats and dragon training and things like that most of the time. However, this question caught him

off guard.

"The dragon?" Hiccup said, a nod from Fishlegs answering his question. His mind whirled for an answer in the short pause he had before it became awkward. "I'm not sure, I'm more worried about keeping it locked up and away where he...it couldn't hurt anyone."

Fishlegs sighed with clear disappointment. "Alright." was all he said. Hiccup nodded, and then opened the door to his house, inviting Fishlegs inside. Closing the door behind him, Hiccup went to the table and sat down, resting his feet from walking all morning.

Hiccup looked around the house again. He saw a few weapons on the wall by the door, and his heart did a leap when he saw his father's usual arsenal still hanging there. His father hadn't bothered to take anything bigger than a dagger with him...had he had any confidence in Hiccup at all? In any case, Hiccup also had to admit that had his dad probably wouldn't have needed a weapon had he himself not freed the dragon.

"Whoa!" Fishlegs exclaimed, and Hiccup whipped his head around to see that he was looking at the stairs, down which the Terror from earlier was coming down. It did a double take at both of the young humans, then squealed and ran back up the stairs, a door slam resounding through the house a moment later. "Was that a Terror?"

"Yeah." Hiccup said nonchalantly. "It's been here since this morning."

"So you just let this thing stay here?" Fishlegs asked, recovering from being caught off guard by the small dragon.

Hiccup shrugged. "It wasn't bothering me too badly."

Fishlegs' expression went from confused to thoughtful. "So you've had this dragon in your house since this morning and it hasn't tried to attack you?"

"Uhhh...yeah, pretty much." Hiccup said.

"Interesting." Fishlegs said. "I mean, Terrors aren't exactly the most threatening dragons, but if we can get this one domesticated...perhaps the others can!"

Hiccup shook his head. "So, what you're saying is that because this one dragon didn't attack me on sight, that means we can...we can..."

An idea suddenly began to form in Hiccup's head. It was crazy, perhaps a little too much so, but then again, it had been a rather crazy day in and of itself.

"Fishlegs...you might just be onto something..."

â€

Stoick shook off the last of the binds holding his wings together. He had ignored them before, but eventually the friction of the rough

ropes rubbing against his wings had started to irritate him. Not out of pain, but because it kept reminding him that his wings existed, and if there was one thing he didn't need, it was constantly being reminded that he was now a Night Fury.

A grumble came from Stoick's stomach. He patted his belly, feeling hunger hitting him hard. He hadn't eaten last night before the raid, and now it was coming back to haunt him. Was raw fish all he had to look forward to as a meal for the rest of his life? Stoick shuddered at the thought, and added that to the list of things that had been ruined by this transformation. He felt another wave of sadness pass over him as thoughts of the tribe, his men, Gobber, Hiccup were pictured clearly in his mind...

Stoick stopped. "What are you doing?" he suddenly asked himself.

"Feeling sorry for myself." he answered.

"And what should you be doing?" he asked in response.

"Finding a way out of here." he answered again.

He chuckled to himself and shook his head. All this time wasted on self-pity and worrying about the future...when had he become such a wuss?

"You're not a dragon. You're a Viking. No matter what you are, no matter what form you take, you will always be a Viking...and a father." he thought, the last word hitting him hard. "Now quit acting like a damn dragon and get yourself out of here. You still have Hiccup to worry about."

Stoick nodded at his own advice, then he got to work on thinking of a plan of escape. This cage could hold a dragon like him easily. But he was no ordinary dragon. He was Stoick the Vast, Chief of the Hairy Hooligans. He would find a way to escape, find his son, and hold him in his arms again, damn the consequences.

â€|

"Train a dragon?" Fishlegs said, giving Hiccup an expression of uttermost confusion.

"Yeah, what do you think?" Hiccup said, hoping against hope that the idea had at least some merit.

"I think you're going insane." Fishlegs blurted out, looking almost shocked at his own blunt honesty. He recovered and continued. "I mean, no one else would believe it could be done..."

"But you think it could, don't you?" Hiccup questioned, a small smirk on his face as he watched Fishlegs tumble around with the idea.

"I mean, in theory I guess it could..." Fishlegs admitted. "But Hiccup, why? Is this because of that Terror? You can't just base that entire idea around one example. And even then, why train a terror in the first place?"

"A Terror perhaps isn't all that useful." Hiccup said. "But imagine

if could do this with one of the bigger dragons."

Fishlegs stared at Hiccup as though the latter had just lost his mind. Then a look of realization came over him.

"You want to train that Night Fury." he said. When Hiccup nodded, he shook his head. "I highly doubt it could be done without significant risk of injury or death, I mean the chances of it happening are-"

"But it could be done, right?"

Fishlegs gulped, and looked towards the door, looking as though he was about to bolt from the room away from this clearly insane friend of his. Hiccup noticed this and nonchalantly stood up and placed himself in between Fishlegs and the door, the latter slinking into a chair. "Not likely. Not likely at all."

Hiccup smirked and thought for a moment. Now he had an excuse to keep the dragon alive, even if it was flimsy. Vikings had had crazier ideas, and it was his dad. As long as that last fact was true, everything should fall into place in this radically forming plan.

"This dragon killed your dad Hiccup." Fishlegs said, his tone more serious than Hiccup had ever heard it. Hiccup frowned, a little taken aback by the frown on his friend's expression. "I'd have thought you'd want revenge, not some sort of mad desire to train it."

Hiccup stood there, knowing what the latter said was true. Any normal Viking, in a normal situation, would do exactly what Fishlegs said. But this was not a normal situation, not in the slightest. He had to tell Fishlegs what he knew, otherwise the latter would never understand. Perhaps he shouldn't not tell though, but-

"Fishlegs, get up." Hiccup commanded, gesturing towards the door and throwing it open.

"What? But why?" Fishlegs said, although he was already standing up nervously, fidgeting with the notebook in his hands.

"You wanted to see the Night Fury right?" Hiccup said.

"Well, not now, when you've told me all of this nonsense. Hiccup I really think-"

"I'm going whether you come with me or not." Hiccup said, one foot out the door.

Fishlegs sighed. "Lead the way." he said in a defeated tone.

8. Instinct

Chapter 8 "Instinct"

Gobber didn't like having things on his mind while he worked. He considered it a distraction, and anything that got between him and his way of making a living as a blacksmith had no business in his thoughts. But today, he had quickly realized of an exception to that

rule. He shook his head clear, grunting with annoyance that he had caught himself staring into the flames of his forge again for the fifth time that day.

He had lost many a friend in his lifetime, but to lose Stoick was something else. He had known the man ever since they had both learned how to use a sword, and had been at each other's back both in battle and out. He remembered when the two had first met during their own dragon training. Then he remembered when Stoick had lost Valka, how he had seemed unsure of how to cope, especially with the then infant Hiccup now squarely in his hands. It was the only time in his life that he had seen Stoick truly struggle with something.

So it was a surprise to Gobber that after Hiccup had come barging into his forge earlier that day with barely held back tears, that the teen had shifted in mood so quickly. From tears to anger to uncharacteristic confidence, it baffled Gobber on how his apprentice, his late friend's son, was taking the death of his father so strangely. He would have expected the teen to have been inconsolable over his father's death, not obsessed with the dragon that had killed his father. It just didn't seem like something Hiccup would do. But then Gobber hadn't been there...though he severely wished he had.

After finding that he had barely gotten any work done since he had arrived back to his forge, Gobber sighed and resigned himself to his mood. He shut off the forge and put away his tools, most of which hadn't even been removed from their spots, which resulted in a quick clean up. After closing the windows and securing the door locks, he stepped out into the village and began making his way home.

It was a nice day out anyways, too nice to spend cooped up in the heat of the forge. Winter was coming soon, so it wasn't like his services were exactly in high demand. Most of the village was more worried about supplies and rebuilding their homes before the first snow came, especially since the dragons had just raided that morning.

The blacksmith sighed as he was again reminded of what the village had lost that day. It was a real blow to their way of life, and while Spitelout would definitely do his best, he knew that it would be a long time before someone like Stoick appeared again. And even then, they could never be the same person as Stoick, their great leader, Gobber's friend, and Hiccup's...

Gobber paused for a moment, then turned on his heel and began making his way down to Stoick's...Hiccup's house. He has suspected earlier that Hiccup might do something rash with the captured Night Fury, considering it had been all the boy could talk about once they had finally gotten it. He had even requested, if not ordered, that a couple guards remain stationed by the dragon cages just to make sure that the boy wouldn't be tempted to do anything stupid. He picked up the pace, feeling strangely anxious about his apprentice.

Gobber stopped to take a breath, more out of his worry than tiredness. What was he so worried about anyways? It wasn't like the boy could even open the cages anyways, he could barely pick up a shield. He tried to relax; as soon as he was done reassuring himself, he could just go back home and...

"Oi Gobber!" a voice called out, sounding slurred, and the blacksmith turned around to see Dogsbreath and his brother. The latter appeared more than a little drunk, and Dogsbreath looked strangely put out at seeing Gobber for some reason. Gobber nodded in acknowledgement, and he was just about to continue his way to Hiccup's place when he realized something.

Weren't _they_ the two men he had told to stand guard by the Fury in the first place?

* * *

><p>Stoick's eyes fluttered open as he woke up. He sat there, puzzled for a moment at the fact that he was waking up at all. He didn't remember falling asleep, but he did remember listening to the incessant babble of the two Viking's outside his cell. He had never been one for small talk, and listening to the two men complain about how long they had to be there and whatnot had driven him nuts. For him, being a Viking meant to put up and shut up; heck, it was literally his name.<p>

But then it hit him...it was quiet. As in, there were no voices or sounds of pacing at all outside. He listened intently, and even knocked on the wall with his paw to see if he got a response, but nothing came.

Stoick's heart leapt. Now was his chance. The door to his cell was in front of him, and beyond lay freedom and his son. With a determined growl, Stoick backed up as much as he could within his claustrophobic cell, then launched himself at the door. A loud slam resounded through the walls, echoing even as Stoick groaned in pain. He looked up; the door hadn't budged at all.

He honestly hadn't expected to have broken free that easily. After all, he had helped to build and strengthen these walls himself, to keep the dragons they had captured at bay for training. Now it appeared he had done his job a little too well. Still, it couldn't hurt to try a few more times...

SLAM!

WHAM!

BAM!

...Ok, now it did hurt. Stoick's entire body was aching, and he would have hit his paw into the ground with frustration if it wasn't already sore. The door showed no sign of damage, and Stoick knew it was time for a change of plans. If brute force wasn't working, then what could?

Then an idea went off in his head. As a dragon, he should be able to breathe fire now, and while the walls were designed to resist it, he also knew that a Fury's flame was much different than your average dragon's. But there was one problem with that...he didn't know how to breathe fire. At least, not yet. He might as well try.

Stoick took a deep breath, steeling himself and facing the door, trying to feel something, anything inside that could help conjure up this possible new weapon of his. A small moment went by as he

concentrated on that door, knowing that beyond lay freedom, his village...and Hiccup.

He exhaled. Nothing happened.

He coughed. Nothing happened.

He even tried roaring at the door as loud as he could. Yet again, nothing happened.

And so it was done. Within the space of half an hour, Stoick the Vast had failed to do anything to break free of his confinement. He sighed and laid down on his side, feeling tired from trying to bash the door down, and taking in just how useless he felt at the moment.

Useless. He remembered a time once when a fellow Viking had called his son that offhand, not knowing he had been listening. By the time he had finished pummeling that idiot's face into his own shield, it had been made abundantly clear that Stoick the Vast still cared for his son. And yet, for all of his bluster and protectiveness...where was he now? Trapped in a cell, his son doing Odin knows what, who was now vulnerable to the dangers on the outside, from both man and dragon.

Stoick felt a sadness welling up in his heart, one that he hadn't felt ever since he had lost his wife to a dragon. Except this time it stung even deeper, for it was his son, the boy who he had once held as a baby in his arms, admiring what a strong and worthy Viking he would one day become. And yet. all he could remember was how he had treated him as anything but. Even this very morning, he couldn't remember anything he had done or said to let Hiccup know that he had cared as much as he did. All of it had hinged on the fact of whether or not Hiccup had managed to do the impossible, shoot down one of the most feared of dragons. His son had done that, and yet, he had pushed him to do more.

Why had Hiccup freed the Fury in the first place? Stoick remembered his son quietly cutting the dragon free of its confinement, despite telling him he would kill it. It had been a lie obviously, but why had he lied? He couldn't have possibly felt sorry for the thing now could he? Well, it didn't matter...he sort of wished Hiccup would do the same for him now, as he had no way of escaping...

"Hiccup, I am honestly not agreeing with this at all!" he suddenly heard outside. Stoick's ears perked up at the mention of his son's name. That voice, it was...Fishlegs? Ingerman's child? What was he doing here? And why was he-

"Relax Fishlegs, we're gonna be fine."

Stoick's heart skipped a beat.

"Now if...only I can...get this door." Hiccup said in between grunts. It sounded as though he was trying to lift something heavy, but he was having trouble. But...why?

"Could use a little help here getting this Fishlegs, looks like they shut it good and tight." Hiccup said.

"Yeah, for a reason!" Fishlegs retorted. "There's a Night Fury in

there! I think it would be in both our best interests if it stayed that way!"

Stoick's jaw dropped. This wasn't...they couldn't _really _be here. He was still asleep, he had to be. All of this being turned into a dragon business...it was all just a horrible dream, though for whatever reason it seemed to be turning brighter.

Hiccup let out an annoyed sigh. "It's all tied up and its probably asleep. There's not a sound coming out of there. You know that dragons don't shut up, especially after they've just been captured."

"Oh alright." Fishlegs said. "But if we get killed doing this...well, then we're dead."

Stoick heard both boys grunting, and then finally the door gave a loud creak as the bolt unlocked and it was pulled open. He stood there, unsure of what to do for a moment as light filled the room, and he blinked a few times as his eyes adjusted to the brightness. Then he saw him. Hiccup, his son, looking scared out of his wits at the sight of the clearly untied and awake Night Fury in front of him.

"What's the matter Hiccup?" Fishlegs said, walking up next to him. Then he turned to see what Hiccup was looking at, and he jumped, dropping his notebook as he looked at the dragon they had just freed.

For a moment there was nothing but silence as dragon and boys stared at each other. Stoick could see the frightened expression on both of their faces, but he was unsure of how to go about calming them down. If he moved forward, that may send them into a panic, and he didn't think he could restrain them in this form either. He'd be too likely to hurt them with this body.

Then Hiccup took a step forward towards him, suddenly looking determined. "We're not here to hurt you." he said. "We're here to set you free."

Fishlegs looked at his friend incredulously. "Uh, no, that's not what we're here for at all!" he hissed.

Hiccup waved a hand at him to be quiet, taking another step forward. Stoick instinctively backed away, unsure why his son was acting so strangely. Then, like a fireball to the chest, it hit him.

"_Oh gods._" he thought. "_He knows it's me._"

Conflicting feelings of shame, relief, and confusion ran through Stoick all at once. His heart swelled as his son approached him slowly but confidently, with his eyes showing a trust that the former chief thought he would never receive again in his life.

"Um...Hiccup, what are you doing?" Fishlegs asked, witnessing the former's actions. "I don't know if you've noticed, but we have a loose Night Fury!" he practically hissed.

"This isn't just a dragon Fishlegs." Hiccup said. "If it was, don't

you think we'd be dead by now?"

Fishlegs mouth remained agape as he watched Hiccup take yet another step towards the offspring of lightning and death. Hiccup's heart was racing, but he pushed on, forcing himself forward towards the Fury, one hand raised defensively in front of him. He stopped when he saw the ropes and other bonds tattered on the ground, a few red-brown scales scattered among them.

After a moment of quiet, he took a deep breath, swallowed to clear his dry mouth, and spoke.

"Dad...are you there?" he asked.

Fishleg's eyes bugged at his friend's question. The Night Fury itself stared at Hiccup for a moment, blinking a few times as it took in the boy's words. Then it took a step forward towards the young Viking, and Hiccup's heart leapt as it slowly but surely brought it's head close to his outstretched hand.

Then, all of a sudden, the Fury stood up on it's hind legs, and Hiccup gasped and stumbled backwards. Before he could fall however, the Fury enveloped him by wrapping it's arms around the young Viking and hugging him softly, as though it was scared of it's own strength.

"Hiccup!" Hiccup heard Fishlegs cry, though it was muffled behind the soft rumbles coming from the dragon. But Hiccup didn't feel threatened at all, even when he felt the dragon's slow breathing going through his hair in the darkness around him. A low croon escaped it, and he felt it gently squeeze him, it's muscular arms trembling slightly.

That was when Hiccup knew, for sure this time, that his father was still alive.

The dragon loosened it's grip, standing up and looking down upon the smaller human. Hiccup met it's eyes and smiled, reaching a hand up and placing it upon the dragon's paw that remained on his shoulder. Then he turned around to look at Fishleg's, whose mouth had dropped open as his eyes darted between his friend and the Night Fury.

"Hiccup?" he asked. "Is...that dragon...really.."

"Yes." was all Hiccup answered. The dragon chuckled.

But before anything else could be said, a man come running into the area, wielding a sharp, dangerous looking sword that the Fury's eyes focused on.

"OI! It's got one of them!" the man cried, and soon after a couple of other Viking's followed behind, Gobber arriving last. Stoick watched the men appear one by one, until three fully armed Vikings stood only a few feet away. A strange feeling began to well up inside of him, and he could feel his thoughts getting...simpler...

Humans. Weapons. Starving.

Stoick shook his head; it felt as though a great weight was settling

in the back of his mind.

Confinement. Walls. Captive.

He took a breath and blinked his eyes, his vision going out of focus. Dizziness swept over him and he fell to the side, landing on his forepaws. But the thoughts kept coming, and he clenched his eyes shut, trying to force them out.

Hunt.

Breed.

Kill...

* * *

><p>"No wait, I'm fine!" Hiccup yelled, feeling the dragon's paw leave his shoulder. "Just hold on, I can explain!"<p>

"Get away from it Hiccup." Gobber said quietly.

Hiccup stammered, and looked over at Fishlegs, desperate for some support. His friend appeared to be taken off guard by both the sudden appearance of these men and the way the dragon had acted, and was still recovering from the shock, so Hiccup turned back to the three Vikings.

"Gobber, you don't understand, this isn't a dragon, this is-" he started, but then he heard something which made his blood run cold. A growl from behind, and both him and Fishlegs turned around slowly.

His dad was standing on all fours, eyes shut tightly and trembling violently. He shook his head once before holding still.

Then his eyes opened, revealing angry slits for pupils.

"GET AWAY FROM IT!" Gobber yelled again.

"Dad?" Hiccup said. "What are you doing?"

"Hiccup." Fishlegs finally said, voice betraying his rising fear. "I think your dad's gone..."

Hiccup looked at him confusedly, but then he understood.

"Gobber no!" Hiccup cried, turning around. "Put away your weapons, you're scaring him and making him feel threatened!"

"That's precisely WHAT it should be feeling Hiccup!" Gobber said, looking at the boy incredulously. "Why do you think we're here in the first place?! Now get out of the way before you get killed!"

Hiccup didn't move, his heart beating frantically in his chest. The Fury growled behind him, but he stayed where he was, determined to not let the dragon be harmed. However, it appeared the Fury didn't have the same notions.

"Human. In the way. Move him." the dragon thought quickly. It

raised a paw, keeping its eyes focused on the young human in front of it, ready to clear it's way...

"Hiccup, watch out!" Fishlegs yelled, and he shoved his friend to the side, out of the way of the Fury's paw...just as it came swinging his way.

Hiccup was still picking himself up off the floor when he heard it; a cry of pain that he never would have guessed could come from a person. He turned his head, and his eyes bugged out as he saw Fishlegs staring down at his chest, a claw mark running across his shirt. Then the red began to appear, seeping through the cloth.

"Ah..." Fishlegs breathed, stumbling backwards. "Ah..." Then he fell back onto the ground, his helmet clattering beside him.

"Fishlegs..." Hiccup gasped, and he turned to look at the dragon, which was now shaking its head furiously, eyes going from slits to the original round pupils it had before. It panted for a moment, then locked eyes with Hiccup before turning towards the other young Viking now on the ground, who was staring down at the fresh wound on his chest. The dragon looked down at its bloodstained paw, and in that split second of realization, Hiccup saw every facet of the dragon's expression convey regret, shame, and guilt. It stood there nervously, looking as worried about the injured human as Hiccup was.

Then a thrown axe suddenly flew past the Fury's head, and impaled into the wall behind it. It looked up, and saw Gobber looking positively murderous.

"Aaaahhhh!" he cried, and the two Vikings beside him did the same, charging forward towards the Fury. Stoick made his decision then and there. He waited for the three Viking's to get close, then unexpectedly threw himself to the side, and sprinted past them, aiming for the exit behind them.

"Don't let it get away!" Gobber said, and the guards chased after it. Hiccup watched the Fury run off towards the village across the bridge. Then he noticed Gobber had remained where he was, also watching the dragon. The blacksmith turned around after the Fury disappeared from sight, and an alarm quickly rang out softly in the distance, signlalling a raid...by single dragon...

Silence fell inside the arena, with the man staring down at Hiccup with a look that the latter had never seen before. The boy gulped, not sure of what to do.

"Haddock..." Gobber said, and Hiccup paled as he heard the man's fury locked behind a veneer of calmness. "...I'm disappointed in you."

Hiccup felt his mouth go dry as his words. Gobber had never sounded this angry before; the entire time Hiccup had known him, he had never seen the blacksmith speak to him like this.

"When your father learns of this, he's going to...to..." Gobber began, but then he trailed off as he realized what he had just said. With a shake of his head, he looked down at Fishlegs, who was

breathing softly and looking drowsy.

"Ingerman needs a healer. Head to the village and get one." Gobber commanded, kneeling down next to Fishlegs and beginning to treat him.

Hiccup nodded without a second thought, and began running towards the village, the alarm still ringing.

End
file.